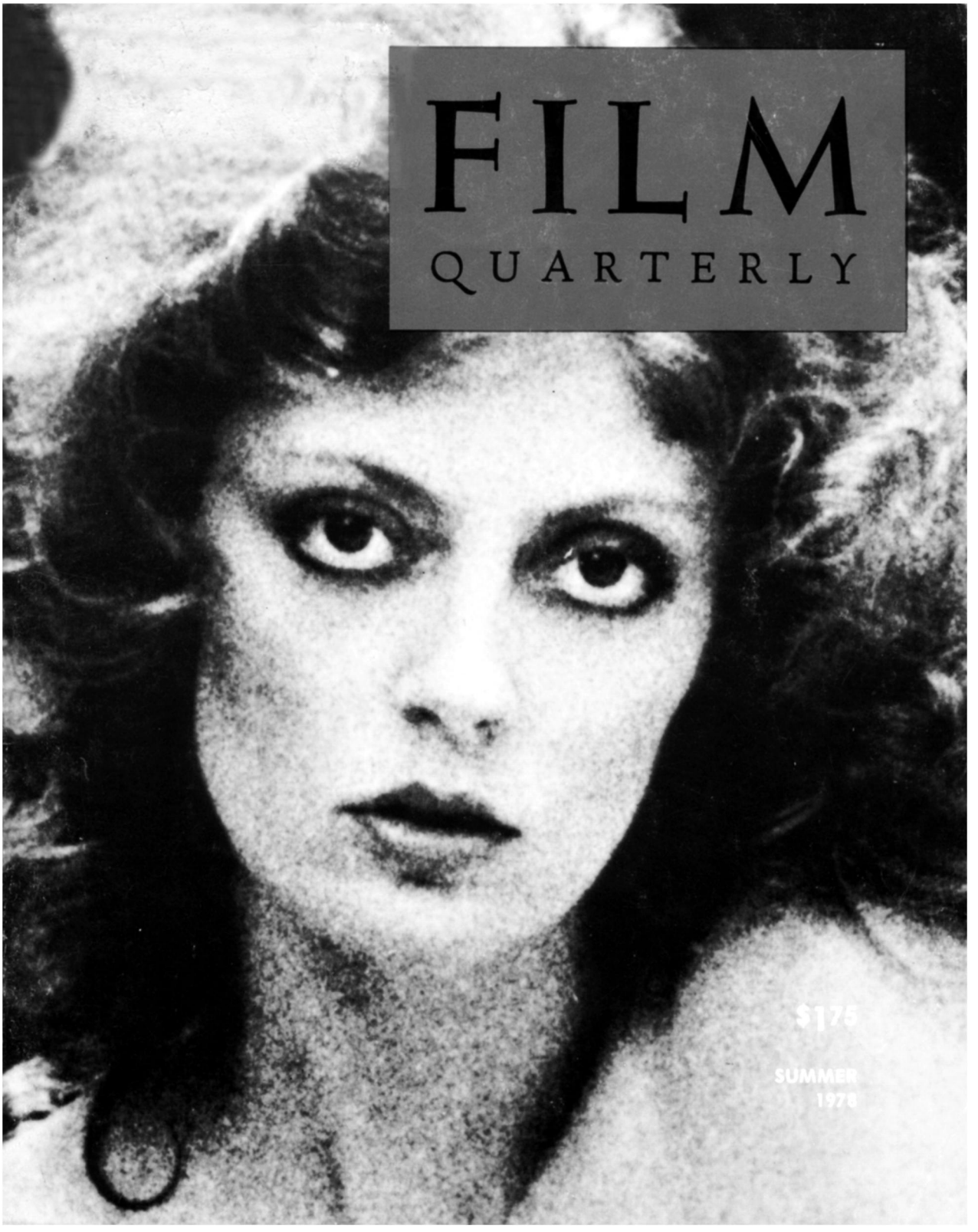
FILM
QUARTERLY

INDEX TO VOLUME XXXI

Titles of films and books reviewed appear in *italics*. First reference number indicates volume number; second indicates issue number; third indicates page. Major topics are also indexed.

Abstract Film and Beyond. 31:3:29
Alice in the Cities. 31:2:9
Altman, Robert. 31:1:10
American Film Industry, The. 31:4:55
Amulet of Ogum, The. 31:4:44
Andrade, Joaquim Pedro de. 31:4:43
Anthropology and film. 31:2:51
Anthropology on Film: A Philosophy of People and Art. 31:2:51
Antonioni, Michelangelo. 31:2:2
Art of Dreaming in *Three Women* and *Providence,* The: Structures of the Self. 31:1:10
Au Hasard, Balthazar. 31:1:19
Babatu. 31:3:6
Bachmann, Gideon. The Man on the Volcano: A Portrait of Werner Herzog. 31:1:2
Badham, John. 31:3:40
Barren Lives. 31:4:44
Barreto, Luiz Carlos. 31:4:43
Barry Lyndon. 31:2:7
Belson, Jordan. 31:3:32
Benning, James. 31:3:53
Bergman, Ingmar. 31:2:3
Bergstrom, Janet. *Leni Riefenstahl: Fallen Film Goddess.* 31:2:62
Bertrand Tavernier: The Constraints of Convention. 31:4:23
Beyond "Abstract" Criticism. 31:3:29
Black Moon. 31:4:7
Blow-Up. 31:2:2
Blue Angel, The. 31:2:5
Brazilian Cinema Today. 31:4:42
Breaking With Old Ideas. 31:3:42
Brecht, Bertolt. 31:2:62
Bresson, Robert. 31:1:19
Browne, Nick. Narrative Point of View: The Rhetoric of *Au Hasard, Balthazar.* 31:1:19
Brooks, Richard. 31:4:52
Brunette, Peter. *The Red Poster.* 31:2:48
Callenbach, Ernest. 11 x 14. 31:3:53
———. *Klaw & Erlanger Present.* 31:2:62
———. *Zavattini: Sequences From a Cinematic Life.* 31:4:56
Care, Ross. *Lisztomania.* 31:3:53
Carrie. 31:1:32
Carroll, Noel. Mind, Medium and Metaphor in Harry Smith's *Heaven and Earth Magic.* 31:2:37
Cassavetes, John. 31:4:50
Cassenti, Frank. 31:2:48
Challenge, The. 31:4:43
Chaplin, Charlie. 31:2:4
Charly. 31:2:6
Chien Andalou, Le. 31:2:42
Chinese Cinema. 31:3:42
Chronique d'un Eté. 31:3:5
Ciné-transe: The Vision of Jean Rouch. 31:3:2
Cinema and society. 31:4:55
Cinema Novo. 31:4:42
Cinéma-vérité. 31:3:2
City Lights. 31:2:4
Clockmaker, The. 31:4:23
Comedy, and sound. 31:1:38
Comedy, romantic. 31:4:11
Conner, Bruce. 31:4:36
Corruption and Catastrophe: De Palma's *Carrie.* 31:1:32
Cosmic Ray. 31:4:40
Covino, Michael. Wim Wenders: A Worldwide Homesickness. 31:2:9
Crossroads. 31:4:36
Cubist Cinema. 31:3:37
De Palma, Brian. 31:1:32
Dempsey, Michael. Ken Russell, Again. 31:2:19
Design for Living. 31:4:14
Diegues, Carlos. 31:4:44
Documentary, theory of. 31:3:15
Dos Santos, Nelson Pereira. 31:4:42; 31:4:45
Dying. 31:4:30
Dying To Be On Television. 31:4:30
11 x 14. 31:3:53
Enthusiasm: From Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye. 31:2:25
Ethnographic Film. 31:2:52
Experimental film. 31:3:29, 31:4:36
Fallout: Some Notes on the Films of Bruce Conner. 31:4:36
Feminism. 31:2:53
Film bei Brecht. 31:2:62
Film/Cinema/Movie. 31:3:61
Film: The Democratic Art. 31:4:55
Film theory. 31:1:57, 31:3:15
Fischer, Lucy. *Enthusiasm:* From Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye. 31:2:25
Five Easy Pieces. 31:2:6
Fleischer, Stefan. Dying to be on Television. 31:4:30
Flitterman, Sandy. *Women and the Cinema.* 31:2:53
Fred Wiseman's Documentaries: Theory and Structure. 31:3:15
General, The. 31:1:38
Georgian cinema. 31:3:11
Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick, The. 31:2:9
Giroux, Henry A. *Looking for Mr. Goodbar.* 31:4:52
Hawks, Howard. 31:4:12
Heart of Glass. 31:1:5
Heaven and Earth Magic. 31:2:37
Heiress, The. 31:2:7
Henderson, Brian. Romantic Comedy Today: Semi-Tough or Impossible? 31:4:11
———. Segmentation. 31:1:57
Herzog, Werner. 31:1:2
High School. 31:3:21
Holiday. 31:4:13
Hospital. 31:3:16
How to Read a Film. 31:2:60
Ioseliani, Otar. 31:3:12
Japanese cinema. 31:2:55
Johnson, Randal. Brazilian Cinema Today. 31:4:42
Johnson, William. *Breaking With Old Ideas.* 31:3:42
Kawin, Bruce. *How to Read a Film.* 31:2:60
Keaton, Buster. 31:1:38; 31:4:11
Ken Russell, Again. 31:2:19
Kinder, Marsha. The Art of Dreaming in *Three Women* and *Providence:* Structures of the Self. 31:1:10
———. *The Man Who Loved Women.* 31:3:48
———. *Opening Night.* 31:4:50
———. *Saturday Night Fever.* 31:3:40
———. *Tent of Miracles.* 31:4:45
Kings of the Road. 31:2:9
Klaw & Erlanger Present . . . 31:2:62
Kubelka, Peter. Restoring *Enthusiasm* (interview). 31:2:35
Lacombe, Lucien. 31:4:4
Last of the Suture?, The. 31:4:64
Légér, Fernand. 31:3:33
LeGrice, Malcolm. 31:3:29
Leni Riefenstahl: Fallen Film Goddess. 31:2:61
Let Joy Reign Supreme. 31:4:23
Li, Wen-hua. 31:3:42
Lisztomania. 31:2:21, 31:3:53
Looking For Mr. Goodbar. 31:4:52
Louis Malle: From *The Lovers* to *Pretty Baby*—An Interview. 31:4:2
Lovers, The. 31:4:2
Lubitsch, Ernst. 31:4:14
Luis Buñuel and *The Cinema of Luis Buñuel.* 31:1:65
Macunaima. 31:4:43
Magretta, Joan, with William R. Magretta. Bertrand Tavernier: The Constraints of Convention. 31:4:23
Mahler. 31:2:20
Malle, Louis. 31:4:2
Man on the Volcano, The: A Portrait of Werner Herzog. 31:1:2
Man Who Loved Women, The. 31:3:48
Matusa, Paula. Corruption and Catastrophe: De Palma's *Carrie.* 31:1:32
Mellen, Joan. A Reply. 31:4:65
Mind, Medium and Metaphor in Harry Smith's *Heaven and Earth Magic.* 31:2:37
Mizoguchi, Kenji. 31:2:56
More Is Less: Comedy and Sound. 31:1:38
Moritz, William. Beyond "Abstract" Criticism. 31:3:29
Moritz, William, with Beverly O'Neill. Fallout: Some Notes on the Films of Bruce Conner. 31:4:36
Movie, A. 31:4:39
Movie-Made America. 31:4:55
Mueller-Sworowski, Roswitha. *Film bei Brecht.* 31:2:62
Murmur of the Heart. 31:4:2
Narrative. 31:1:19
Narrative Point of View: The Rhetoric of *Au Hasard, Balthazar.* 31:1:19
Nichols, Bill. Fred Wiseman's Documentaries: Theory and Structure. 31:3:15
———. *Nonfictional Film: Theory and Criticism.* 31:1:67
———. Three Books on Film and Anthropology. 31:2:51
Nicholson, Jack. 31:2:6
Nonfictional Film: Theory and Criticism. 31:1:67
Obsession. 31:1:2
O'Neill, Beverly, with William Moritz. Fallout: Some Notes on the Films of Bruce Conner. 31:4:36
O'Neill, Pat. 31:3:34
Opening Night. 31:4:50
Pastorale. 31:3:14
Persona. 31:2:3
Point of view. 31:1:19
Pretty Baby. 31:4:2
Principles of Visual Anthropology. 31:2:51
Providence. 31:1:10
Psychoanalysis and avant-garde film. 31:2:43
Psychoanalysis, *Providence* and *Two Women.* 31:1:10
Red Poster, The. 31:2:48
Reflections on the Face in Film. 31:2:2
Report. 31:4:40
Resnais, Alain. 31:1:10
Restoring *Enthusiasm.* 31:2:35
Riefenstahl, Leni. 31:2:61
Ritchie, Michael. 31:4:14
Rocha, Glauber. 31:4:42
Roemer, Michael. 31:4:30
Romantic Comedy Today: Semi-Tough or Impossible? 31:4:11
Rouch, Jean. 31:3:2
Russell, Ken. 31:2:19, 31:3:55
Salt, Barry. Film Style and Technology in the Forties. 31:1:46
———. The Last of the Suture; [letter]. 31:4:64
Samurai Film, The. 31:2:58
Saraceni, Paulo César. 31:4:43
Saturday Night Fever. 31:3:40
Scola, Ettore. 31:2:45
Segmentation. 31:1:57
Seitz, Michael. *We All Loved Each Other So Much!* 31:2:45
Semi-Tough. 31:4:14
Shaffer, Lawrence. Reflections on the Face in Film. 31:2:2
Singing Blackbird, A, and Georgian Cinema.
Sisters. 31:1:32
Smith, Harry. 31:2:37
Sound. 31:2:25; 31:4:10
Sound, and comedy. 31:1:38
Sternberg, Joseph von. 31:2:5
Stroszek. 31:1:6
Sturges, Preston. 31:4:13

Surrealism and cinema. 31:2:42
Tavernier, Bertrand. 31:4:23
Technology, and film style. 31:1:46
Tent of Miracles. 31:4:42; 31:4:45
Thomas, Paul. Three Books on Film and Society. 31:-4:55
Three Books on Film and Anthropology. 31:2:51
Three Books on Film and Society. 31:4:55
Three Women. 31:1:10
Thornton, Sybil. *The Samurai Film*. 31:2:58
———. *The Waves at Genji's Door*. 31:2:55
Trobriand Cricket. 31:3:4
Truffaut, François. 31:3:48
Valentino. 31:2:22
Vertov, Dziga. 31:2:25
Warshow, Paul. More Is Less: Comedy and Sound. 31:1:38
Waves at Genji's Door, The. 31:2:55
We All Loved Each Other So Much! 31:2:45
Wenders, Wim. 31:2:9
Whitney, James. 31:3:32
Willis, Don. *Film/Cinema/Movie*. 31:3:61
———. *Luis Buñuel* and *The Cinema of Luis Buñuel*. 31:1:65
———. *A Singing Blackbird*, and Georgian Cinema. 31:3:11
Wim Wenders: A Worldwide Homesickness. 31:2:9
Wiseman, Fred. 31:3:15
Women and the Cinema. 31:2:53
Wrong Movement. 31:2:9
Xica da Silva. 31:4:44
Yakir, Dan. *Ciné-transe:* The Vision of Jean Rouch. 31:3:2
———. Louis Malle: From *The Lovers* to *Pretty Baby*—An Interview. 31:4:2
Zavattini: Sequences From A Cinematic Life. 31:4:56
Zazie.31:4:4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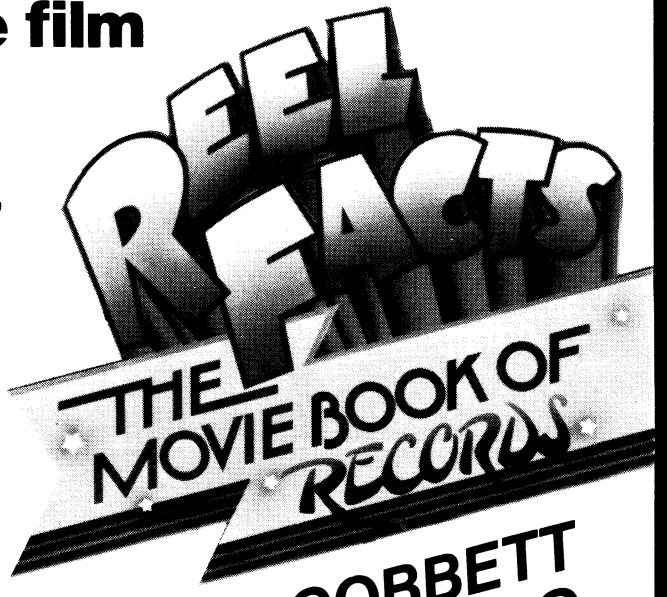

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VOLUME XXXI, No. 4 Summer 1978

INTERVIEW

Louis Malle: From *The Lovers* to *Pretty Baby* — DAN YAKIR 2

ARTICLES

Romantic Comedy Today: Semi-Tough or Impossible? — BRIAN HENDERSON 11

Bertrand Tavernier: The Constraints of Convention — WILLIAM R. AND JOAN MAGRETTA 23

Dying to Be on Television — STEFAN FLEISCHER 30

Fallout: Some Notes on the Films of Bruce Conner — WILLIAM MORITZ AND BEVERLY O'NEILL 36

Brazilian Cinema Today — RANDAL JOHNSON 42

REVIEWS

Tent of Miracles — MARSHA KINDER 45

Opening Night — MARSHA KINDER 50

Looking for Mr. Goodbar — HENRY A. GIROUX 52

FEATURE

Another Giant Film Book Round-Up 55

CONTROVERSY AND CORRESPONDENCE 64

COVER: Susan Sarandon in Malle's *Pretty Baby*. (Photo: Maureen Lambray)

Editor's Notebook

UNDERGROUND CABLE

The advent of videodisc, which has been promised for half a decade, keeps receding in an alarmingly mirage-like way. So a foundation-supported organization called Independent Cinema Artists and Producers is attempting to gain wider circulation for independent films by utilizing television—in particular cable systems, whose relatively specialized audiences can be interested in unorthodox screen fare more readily than theater audiences. ICAP's operation resembles the system pioneered by Film-Makers Coop and Canyon Cinema: 75% of broadcast fees go to the artist. Both 16mm films and 3/4" cassettes of broadcast quality are eligible. Film and video makers are urged to send descriptive material to ICAP at 99 Prince Street, New York 10012.

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Fallout: Some Notes on the Films of Bruce Conner — WILLIAM MORITZ AND BEVERLY O'NEILL 36

Brazilian Cinema Today — RANDAL JOHNSON 42

REVIEWS

Tent of Miracles — MARSHA KINDER 45

Opening Night — MARSHA KINDER 50

Looking for Mr. Goodbar — HENRY A. GIROUX 52

FEATURE

Another Giant Film Book Round-Up 55

CONTROVERSY AND CORRESPONDENCE 64

COVER: Susan Sarandon in Malle's *Pretty Baby*. (Photo: Maureen Lambray)

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DAN YAKIR

Louis Malle

an interview

from *The Lovers* to *Pretty Baby*

"Behind reality there's something else, and we're looking for it."

Auteurist film critics have sometimes given less than wholehearted approval to the *oeuvre* of Louis Malle, disregarding the stylistic and thematic consistency manifested in his films for over twenty years. His rebellion against the tyranny of genre and convention created the impression that each of his films was a new departure that failed to fit into convenient molds. Each Malle film is indeed a new departure—his innovative questioning of the medium rivals that of Buñuel—and his work is much larger than the sum of its parts.

Unlike directors like Polanski or Forman who adjusted their considerable talents to the American system to produce successful if less personal films, Malle in his first American project, *Pretty Baby*, chose to adjust the system to his own creative genius while continuing to explore his life-long interest in youth and the process of growing up. He has taken an enormous risk with *Pretty Baby*, as he also did in *Murmur of the Heart*. Not only does it deal with a child prostitute and her relationship with an older man, a subject bound to inflame the rage of many, but it is also his most restrained and understated film to date, which may baffle the popcorn addict.

With charm that is never facile and tenderness untainted by sentimentality, Malle examines his adolescent characters before they lose their last vestige of magic, that wondrous look at the world that they can no longer cast as adults. Instead of yearning to recapture the bliss of a paradise lost, he embarks upon a penetrating search for "a moment of truth, *the* moment of truth in our lives." This moment involves exposure to the absurd and corrupt world of adults . . .

Why your fascination with adolescence and the ritual of entering the adult world?

I'm fascinated by it through my own experience and what I feel about what's going on today. For most of us, when we are about to become adults and live by the rules of the adult world, we have to leave behind a lot of the freedom, and fantasy, and looseness. There's always a moment when you find out that those rules are not necessarily right.

In previous stages of our civilization—before the industrial society, especially in the twentieth century where things are going so fast: in twenty years, the world has changed more than during five centuries in the Middle Ages, so society is much less stable—in periods of very slow change, children were almost provided with a moment to experiment. In the Middle Ages or the Renaissance—actually up to the twentieth century—most of the time, if you were the son of a peasant, you would become a peasant yourself, following your father. Artisans would go on tours around the country and learn their trade: society seemed to find it necessary to provide a moment for adolescents to experiment, before they return to society as members. Today the cut is much more abrupt and traumatic.

To me, personally, the period of adolescence—between the ages 12 and 15—has been absolutely crucial. There were two central events in my youth—and in my life. One was the war. In 1944, I was 11. A lot of traumatic things happened to me and I remember it much more vividly than I remember the rest of the forties and even the fifties. I remember the first six months of 1944

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Louis Malle directing Brooks Shields in PRETTY BABY

practically day by day.

Then I had this heart murmur, so I was taken out of school and had to stay home and work on my own. That's when I started being very much alone, reading a lot—and lots of things happened to me in that period. It was very difficult, because I was supposed to be sick and I didn't know what would become of me—I was not supposed to do any physical activity. I was very sheltered and I started looking around me. This accident must have accentuated my curiosity. In fact, even in my very first film, I managed to inject in the story a very young couple—the girl was 16 and the boy 17: he was Georges Poujouly of *Forbidden Games*.

How important to you is the notion of innocence of children and its loss?

I'm not really sure that children are innocent. From a very early age, practically from birth, they're exposed to a lot of information. If you oppose innocence to a sense of guilt, there's no question that children in our society are tremendously exposed to guilt. It's almost imprinted by their education. When you're a child, you tend to rely much more on first-hand experience, which is acquired through your senses—seeing, touching, smelling. That's what's so great about it. But when you become 13 or 14, education becomes very abstract and you're supposed to get your experience and information from books, which is second-hand: through someone else's experience. This is definitely wrong—it cuts you off from the world, from nature.

I was thinking of innocence as expressed in Skolimowski's Deep End: *a boy discovers the world for the first time by finding sex and then the only thing that can follow is death—everything else would be an anticlimax.*

Sex is a terribly important part of growing up. It's obvious. Usually, adults have a tendency to consider children as sexless, which makes it a lot easier for the adults, but we know it's not true. What you find out when you become an adult is

Malle's MURMUR OF THE HEART *confronted another taboo: incest.*

corruption—here innocence can be opposed to corruption—and corruption is the importance of money, of social structures, the inability to achieve what one wants and the fact that, for all these reasons, every adult has a double language. You have to compromise all the time, say things you don't really mean, dealing with the obvious hypocrisy in which we live—it's part of the art of living.

This is what Zazie finds out: everything is deceptive and corrupt.

Zazie is in many ways a perfect archetype, because it was almost classical in its structure: a little girl coming to the big city, Paris, from the country, for 36 hours and then she goes back. And what happens to her is discovering that not only the world of adults but also modern civilization, the Big City . . . she discovers that everybody is lying, everybody is pretending—they're not what they seem to be. It's part of the game, in comedy, to have people change physical appearances. *Zazie* exposed exactly what I've been trying to do since, but it's very much in the open because in the book it was like that—this man, Gabriel, was changing identity every two reels, appearing in a different costume . . . His wife was a woman who was also a man, and everybody was upside down. I even managed to shoot scenes where in the same dolly shot we would change objects: a chair was red and the next time the camera passed by it, it was blue. I made it obvious in a very aggressive way that we live in a world which, we pretend, is one, but instead is multiple and changing—and we try to deal with that contradiction.

If you're a child, you want the Truth. And we know—and that's the knowledge that takes years to accept—that there's no such thing. It's a matter of consensus: an accepted truth in one society will not be accepted in another. I'm very sensitive to this aspect of living. There's always a moment when you find out that your parents are lying to you—and they all do, even if they try not to. It's the main shock that starts you off.

ZAZIE DANS LE METRO

You have said that Black Moon *was born out of the last ten minutes of* Lacombe, Lucien. *In what way? Did* Pretty Baby *originate out of* Black Moon? *In* Black Moon *a daughter breast-feeds her mother, which is also the motif that ends the film.* Pretty Baby *opens with a girl watching her mother give birth.*

What I meant to say about the end of *Lacombe, Lucien*, is that I had the idea of *Black Moon* around the figure of Thérése Giehse who plays the Jewish grandmother in *Lacombe* and is the central character, a sort of Mother Earth, in *Black Moon.* The idea struck me when we shot the end of *Lacombe,* which we shot in sequence. Those three characters lost in the wilderness, with time dissolving—a pause when everything stops and time ceases to be important—a suspended moment. Visually and emotionally, *Black Moon* is a prolongation of the last ten minutes of *Lacombe,* which were a break from the rest of the picture. The fact that they were finally losing themselves is different: it was not really necessary but I felt I needed it.

Black Moon starts more or less where *Lacombe* stops because, after all, we could very well imagine at the end of *Lacombe* that they find a big house, where there's an old lady in a bed . . . It was the same archaic landscape. We shot it practically in the same place.

There is also something between *Black Moon* and *Pretty Baby.* In *Black Moon,* I try to make the point—symbolically—about the little girl who is sort of becoming a mother for the mother. In *Pretty Baby,* the relationship between Hattie and Violet is very much a reversal of roles.

What was the function of the role reversals in Black Moon?

It was, again, about identities which aren't really clear: people changing physical appearances. They were inside and outside their bodies all the time. And you have this strange couple, who are supposedly brother and sister, but at some point she's more masculine and he more feminine.

BLACK MOON [*Cathryn Harrison*]

Consciously or unconsciously, I'm trying to express this fundamental doubt that I have about people actually being what they pretend to be. I show people always searching for something else and sometimes being very unhappy with what they are—this search of identity which seems to be one of the traumas of this society. It was a lot easier to be yourself in a very rigid society like the Indian caste system, where everything—from the moment you were born—was decided for you. You were part of the universe, playing a very specific role vis-à-vis society, your family . . . All your life was extremely predictable. Today, we're in a much looser society, where people are more in charge of their individual destiny and it's a source of extreme confusion and disorder, because psychologically many of them cannot assume their identity and pretend to be something else.

In Pretty Baby, *the theme of reality versus appearance is also very strong: apart from the brothel being a factory of illusions, the illusion merchants themselves fall prey to what they manufacture: Hattie believes the earrings she gets from "Highpockets" are hers to keep; the German prostitute tries to lure the old man into marrying her so she could get out—but he never marries her.*

The whorehouse is a sort of microcosm of the real world, but a caricature of it, a crude and open reflection of the real world. Politically, the power structure is very much like in our society, where money is essential. It's all about money and men are definitely on top of women—it's all about the exploitation of women. When somebody is rich and powerful, he can do practically what he wants and is provided with everything he wants as long as he can pay for it. And the gigantic hypocrisy when you have an official red-light district, frequented by politicians—and it's completely accepted . . .

The audience also falls prey to illusion. In the opening scene, we see the exterior of the brothel at night—but the rest of the film takes place indoors, so it's always lit, even at night. Another example, when Violet sees her mother give birth, at first she sighs as if she were having sex, then groans in pain, and finally we find out she's really giving birth.

The opening scene is something I had in mind from the very beginning. I practically started with the birth scene, which was taken from the Al Rose book: about one of the whores giving birth in the attic in the middle of the night, while the "action" is going on downstairs . . . So, I thought that if I had this first scene, starting with a close-up of the little girl watching very attentively and you don't know what's going on, you may think the suffering and the screaming and moaning that comes with birth is very close to the sounds of orgasm. This confusion was deliberately provoked and it's a good start for the story: this confusion between the process of life and sexual activity.

Photography is an illusion too: Hattie is made to look "like an angel," which she wasn't. Bellocq himself says he's dealing with magic.

The whole context of the film is an illusion. I took advantage of the fact that it was taking

place in New Orleans, where voodoo is so important. They live in a strange world and believe in a lot of irrational things. And of course, Bellocq, "the artist," is a man who is trying to track down an illusion. Photography is an illusion, filmmaking is an illusion . . . I felt extremely close to the character of Bellocq—I very much identified with him and when I directed Keith, I deliberately made him behave like a movie director. In the photography session in Hattie's room, when he tells her those stupid things: "You're beautiful! Perfect! Don't move! It's going to be great!"

This scene has heavy sexual overtones. Bellocq tells Violet to leave the room and then asks Hattie: "Are you ready for me?"

It was meant to be the transposition of a sexual dream, where actual sex is replaced by . . . Definitely, for Bellocq, his art is a means to get rid of an obsession which has to do with sexual fantasy. It's an obvious transposition of sex into something else, which supposedly creativity is all about.

The only instance where appearance becomes *reality is Hattie's marriage. She also keeps her promise to Violet to claim her back. Why do you give her this opportunity that you deny the others—nobody else really leaves prostitution. You even said that Violet would probably leave home and, who knows, might even return to the old profession. Why is Hattie so lucky? Or maybe it's a technicality—to leave Violet on her own?*

It's a technicality, but at the same time I tried to make the Hattie character so obsessed with the idea of leaving the whorehouse and becoming respectable—she's been trying for years, and when she finally succeeds, the madam says: "Well, you finally nailed one, huh?" Everyone else wants to do so too but she is maybe more dedicated to the goal . . .

I took it for granted, because it was in the original story—in the Al Rose book: Violet met one of the johns that eventually became her husband, and from that time on she led a respectable life. So, for me, it was a part of the story from the beginning, only I transferred it to the mother.

I had a few things in mind from the very beginning: Bellocq, the birth scene, the scenes with the child in the middle of the whorehouse, the fact that at some point the mother would go . . . I considered the possibility that Hattie is thrown out of the house and starts working in a lower

PRETTY BABY: *"I felt extremely close to the figure of Bellocq . . ."*

part of Storyville, as a lower-class prostitute, but I dropped it.

Why does Violet single out the "Professor" (the pianist) and then Bellocq to share looks of complicity with? Is it because they're all outsiders, observers rather than participants?

Yes, because if you're Violet who is raised in a whorehouse and knows very little about the world outside . . . Her experience of the world comes from what she sees in the house. She sees men who are like objects—she has no relationship with them because they come for something very precise, they're completely anonymous. The johns, the customers, don't really exist. So, Violet is left with the men in the house with whom she can have a relationship—the two outsiders: the piano player who is black, as most of them were, who is very lucid, watching the scene with a lot of irony—his presence itself is a comment. During the auction scene, there is a very long shot of him and you can imagine all kinds of things going through his mind.

Bellocq is also an outsider and is the one man the girls can relate to because he's different—he's not looking for sex, he's not a john, and he becomes a friend: he's a human being, not someone who's going to "lie on top of you," as one of the girls says.

The theme of observer and participant brings us back to Black Moon—*Cathryn Harrison is an observer, and so is Zazie.*

Oh yes, the character of Cathryn in *Black Moon* is an observer. It's a bit strange: she's watching her own dream, her own illusion. You could easily say it's a world created by her, a daydream she's inventing—watching her own fantasy. But she's drifting . . .

It has always been essential to me to have the central character as an observer of a situation, whatever the situation may be. Violet—in *Pretty Baby* we see what's going on through Violet's eyes. I even asked Paramount to state it in the advertising campaign: "a world seen through a child's eyes."

Black Moon *shares with Rivette's* Céline et Julie Vont en Bateau *references to Lewis Carroll, especially to* Alice in Wonderland. *What interests you in Lewis Carroll?*

This obsession with children, with girls, which is totally sublimated, totally transposed—God knows they've been trying to find all kinds of sexual perversions in Lewis Carroll but they don't seem to be able to dig out anything really serious. Technically, it was sort of a-sexual and it seems that just talking to girls, taking them for boat trips or photographing them was enough to satisfy his fantasy. It's very mysterious. There's something opaque about him. This sort of double-life he led: being a very respectable clergyman on the one hand and a mathematician and teacher on the other—his odd relationships with girls, how he dealt with their parents . . . It's very Victorian, very proper: asking the parents' permission to photograph the girls naked . . . and being so prudent and careful about the whole thing! The result is similar to Bellocq's photographs—it's stunning how he managed to capture . . . Some of these Lewis Carroll photographs are very erotic, because they convey a very strong obsession.

Some people see Alice *as the beginning of the Comedy of the Absurd. Does it interest you in this sense?* Zazie *can be related to that.*

Yes, many times I was tempted to deal with *Alice* in a more obvious way than I had done. The discovery of Lewis Carroll, when I was very young, was very important to me and I've certainly been influenced by him, but I don't think I'll do justice to my interest in him and to his writing just by filming one of his books. There's a very interesting one called *Sylvie and Bruno.* It's a world which is totally double-faced. There are several levels: the real, the dream-world of these children, and how they invent the people surrounding them in a completely different way. I'm very turned on by this way of looking at the world—that behind reality there's something else, and we're looking for it.

In Zazie, Black Moon *and* Pretty Baby, *the girls are constantly associated with animals. Why?*

It probably has to do with my own interest in the animal world. It also seems to me children are a lot closer to animals. In the last two centuries, we've managed to isolate ourselves from the animal world, from nature. We've not only cut ourselves from it, but also destroyed it. The more powerful we become technologically, the more we destroy. If things go on at this rate, there'll be nothing left on earth except humans. If there's a Capital Sin, this must be it.

Why did you use the unicorn in Black Moon?

What's so interesting about the myth of the unicorn is that it can be found in almost every culture. So, it must have something very strong about it, it must correspond to a need. It's a fabulous animal and lots of times it was taken for real. In *Black Moon,* she expresses wisdom. She's supposed to be the equivalent of the old lady—her alter-ego, the same person in a different body. Also, in the part of France where I live, which is a very archaic landscape, very wild and untouched—it seems that a unicorn could . . . She's almost the same color as the landscape, a part of it, so it almost seemed natural that she would appear. When I was writing *Lacombe, Lucien,* I found out there was a local legend about a unicorn kidnapping local girls and raping them. It goes back to the collective unconscious . . . I felt obliged to use the unicorn—I had no choice . . .

In three key scenes in Pretty Baby, *Bellocq is seen through glass: when he arrives at the brothel, when he leaves it, and when Violet goes to his*

LACOMBE, LUCIEN

house and sees him through the glass door. Is it to bring about a distanciation effect, to leave him a mystery, a reflection that corresponds to the lens of his camera?

In these moments, he's seen by Violet. It's her point of view. The fact that it's through windows or mirrors makes it almost a creation of hers . . . We don't really see him; we see him in the eyes *of.*

There's a big difference between *Pretty Baby* and *Black Moon* in that *Pretty Baby* pretends to be a realistic picture: every rational explanation is provided for what's going on, which is not the case with *Black Moon.* But finally it comes back to the same thing: the world of illusion, as you say, the fact that it's seen from a child's eye makes it even more . . . We could discuss for hours the subjectivity of her *regard* on things.

You mentioned mirrors. In Pretty Baby, *the German prostitute looks at herself in the mirror as she talks about the old man—and we see her reflection. Except for Violet's make-up session in front of the mirror, there's another scene toward the end where the "Professor" examines himself in the mirror but we don't see the mirror. Why don't you show it?*

I try not to work that way. The more I go on, the more I try to let things happen. It's not something that came out of a reflection—a reflection about a reflection . . . I feel increasingly free to let things take their course and I like to be surprised by the way I shoot a scene. When I'm editing, I see the same scene 200 times and I have a lot of time to think about how I did it. Sometimes I surprise myself: I realize I could have done it in an entirely different way, so why did I do it this way? Sometimes I have an explanation and sometimes I don't.

That's what I said about shooting a documentary: if you put your camera in the street, the way you film is an interpretation. So, it's your point of view, it's a mirror game—and it's terribly unconscious, partly because you shoot it very quickly and only later do you try to understand why. I try to do it in fiction too now, as much as I can. I try to invent a world, I put my camera in front of it, and then I try to shoot it the way I'd shoot a documentary. There's less and less of a difference between documentary and fiction in that scene.

Except in terms of subject matter. You didn't make a documentary about growing up, for example.

I have a son who is six years old now and for the first three years of his life, I've been filming him constantly. I must tell you, I got to a point where it became difficult. It takes a lot of discipline to do that, so I stopped. But I have piles of 16mm which eventually could be an interesting little documentary. It would be terribly interesting to keep doing it for 15 years. I've always wanted to do it, and I'm probably going to: since I have two children now, it's a lot easier . . .

It's interesting to examine Pretty Baby *through camera movement. It opens with a very slow zoom to the brothel, followed by an almost identical zoom to Violet. There is another zoom toward the whores laughing in the corridor during the game of "sardines." At the breakfast table, at the end, the camera pulls back, taking a distance from Violet and Bellocq.*

The first zoom was, of course, on a miniature. I found out in Paris that some crazy jazz musicians spent 15 years of their lives rebuilding New Orleans in a huge room, so we used it. I tried to give the impression of a bird's view of Storyville, getting closer and closer to what is supposed to be Basin Street. Then, when we get inside, we get closer to Violet with a very slow, almost unnoticed, zoom—when she watches the birth: it's a prolongation of the previous shot. I thought it was a good balance.

The breakfast scene is a good one. I used it to show the routine of their life together. It starts with a very irritating moment when she puts a lot of butter on her toast and then we pull back and discover Bellocq watching her, and then we pull more and see the maid coming in. It's all in one shot. It's a movement which actually replaces a series of shots. The close up starts almost like an insert, and then you have the entire setting slowly revealed. There was a break in the story—a few months have passed since the picnic scene, since the marriage—and I felt this device also helped indicate the passage of time.

There's a scene where the madam, Nell, washes her feet and a little girl watches and fiddles with her own feet as she will later fiddle with Bellocq's shoelaces. It is very striking visually though of no visible service to the story.

I thought it would be interesting to establish the presence of the little girl, who is another Violet. From the very beginning, she's initiated into the adult world, and this crazy old woman

washing her feet in hot water . . . I did it insidiously, as I usually try to make my camerawork: there was no separate shot. It was in the movement of the men who bring in the huge piece of meat and they enter the kitchen, which is when I pan down and discover the old woman wiping her feet with the little girl watching her. It's all part of the same movement, and the pan is almost unnoticed. All these details are significant but they aren't taken out to be made into something very obvious. If I were to define the way I approach a camera movement, I'd say it's very insidious. My camera movements are not meant to be noticed—they're very much improvised and I try to be as unconscious as possible with the use of the camera.

You mentioned a few images that became the starting point of Pretty Baby. *How about* Zazie *and* Black Moon?

Black Moon was definitely the old lady in bed—in my bed, in my house . . . It was a fantasy about a woman being almost immortal and ruling the world from this bed, communicating via a weird radio system. That was the starting point. And also the old convention of the fairy tale: the little girl walking alone in that landscape and entering the empty house. It was a mixture of these two images.

Zazie for me was this tiny little girl in the middle of the Parisian traffic, looking around and getting in trouble with every possible adult—just her presence was disturbing.

What is the relationship between Black Moon *and* Phantom India?

It's very unconscious. I found out later that the whole idea of *Black Moon*—the idea that the world doesn't exist, that reality is a dream—the whole philosophical outlook of the film is very Indian. It's more precise in the sense that I used this engraving as a sort of leitmotif in the story—there's a vulture, a weeping woman and a man cutting the vulture's head. And it becomes reality at the point where Joe Dallessandro starts killing the vulture. It's as if it came out of the engraving. The film is completely structured like a myth, and it's a direct reference to the Ramayana.

What major literary influences do you acknowledge?

Many different ones. I've been under the spell of Montaigne when I was young. I was very impressed by Proust. Recently, I've been interested in Indian literature—the *Bhagavad Gita.* I would certainly mention Lewis Carroll.

Could you attach a book to each of your films, in terms of time?

Not really, no. The situation in *The Lovers* was taken from a nineteenth-century short story, *Point de Lendemain,* by Vivant Denon, an obscure writer who was a contemporary of Choderlos de Laclos, to whom he is sometimes compared. In those days I was very much in line with Montaigne and eighteenth-century writers like Marivaux. There's certainly something of Marivaux in *The Lovers.* He is a much more important writer than is usually acknowledged.

Just by shooting *The Fire Within,* I expressed my interest in Drieu la Rochelle, whose inner contradictions always fascinated me.

Recently I've been freer from literature, I think . . .

You have revolutionized film music. Using Miles Davis in Elevator to the Gallows *was completely new. You used Satie in* The Fire Within *while using no music at all in* The Thief of Paris. *How do you see the use of the sound track? Do you see it as an additional layer of meaning, supplementary or contradictory to what goes on the screen?*

I try to use it in many opposite directions. I think it's just as important as the image, if not more so. The problem with the sound track is that it involves a contradiction. On the one hand, sound is a lot more abstract than sight. Music is an art form which naturally escapes reality. The great thing about the sound track is that you can add things, while the camera is a very stupid instrument: it films what you put in front of it. Of course, you can do a lot of things with the light, and you can change a little in printing, but it's very limited. On the other hand, the main purpose of the sound track is to bring you the dialogue, which is where the theater, psychology, the "message" and everything that is heavy in film come in. In most films, the sound track is merely dialogues with music, which is nothing but pleonasm—accentuating the atmosphere or the situation, usually "psychological" music. This is uninteresting. But there is a lot to invent in the sound track. For years, film was enslaved to sound. When the sound film appeared, the great thing was to hear what the actors said, and to get away from that has already taken 40 years. And

it's going to take a lot more.

I put less and less dialogues in my films: I'm a bit reluctant about dialogues, and I don't really trust them to convey what I want. I try to be more ambiguous and more complex than dialogues can express. You could say more with a bell ringing and with an effect that you add to the sound track during sound editing—and I spend much time on it—than by the dialogue.

I try to use music the way visuals are used, as part of the scene. In *Pretty Baby,* jazz was a part of the scene—the beginning of jazz. It was a part of daily life, but I used it very discreetly because I didn't feel the picture needed a score. Sometimes I use music as a comment, and at other times as a counterpoint: against the mood. In *Pretty Baby,* I took advantage of this great music that I love. In the picnic, there's that New Orleans combo playing "After the Fall," a very famous song of the time, and it's very much in the spirit of the scene, but it wasn't written for it. I'd say it's used more as a comment in *Pretty Baby.*

It's different in the case of *Elevator to the Gallows.* It was my first film and I was completely in love with the music of Miles Davis. It's a very interesting film, but I find some moments almost embarrassing. Miles Davis made it into something better than it actually was. It gave the picture a style, a tempo and a climax that it didn't have. It's practically the only time . . . Yes, the other exception would be the use of the Brahms Sextet in *The Lovers.* It's used in a conventional way because it brings a romantic mood into the love scene in that long, slow night shared by Jeanne Moreau and Jean-Marc Bory. It was beautiful but its use was almost manipulative. It was certainly trying to convey certain emotions.

The use of Satie in *The Fire Within* was much more discreet, more like a counter-point. These little piano pieces create a very melancholic atmosphere but, at the same time, there's definitely something ironical about it. It was a sort of distanciation from what was going on on the screen.

When I've been successful in using music in my films, it's always been music that I've been listening to while writing the script or shooting the film. So naturally, it entered the picture and became part of its structure. I always use music that I'm very familiar with and that corresponds to my mood, because I take for granted that my mood is in my films. I was very much into the Gymnopedie and Gnocienne by Satie that I used in *The Fire Within.* Same thing with the Brahms Sextet.

If I used Wagner in *Black Moon,* it's because I became interested in him fairly recently. I used to be very much against his music because of my family background—my grandfather was almost a Wagner scholar. I used to think his music was boring. But I listened to a lot of Wagner when I wrote the script of *Black Moon,* so it entered the picture.

Can a film be structured musically?

Yes, but audiences don't like it. I think *Black Moon* was structured musically: there are a number of musical figures that I use in the script, like the principle of recurrence which has a contrapuntal value—you expose a theme and then return to it. The way the themes are exposed and re-exposed in different ways, the way they are repeated or reversed, the use of leitmotifs—how the same sound, image or movement come back.

It has not been very well received, I guess because they're not used to it. When they listen to music, I suppose they close their eyes and concentrate. When you're listening to a fugue, you're capable of following more or less what the composer intended, but in film they still want to follow the plot—which is more related to the theater than to anything else, in terms of dramatic rules. It's difficult to offer something different.

BRIAN HENDERSON

Romantic Comedy Today: Semi-Tough or Impossible?

1

It is a scandal of culture that there has never been a widely accepted theory of comedy, to organize the general sense of the subject and to orient particular studies within it. Since Aristotle there has been a theory of tragedy, more or less the same one. (Hegel's and Bradley's theories have different emphases but are compatible with it and relate to their object in a similar way.) But each theorist of comedy has worked in a vacuum. Nevertheless each has set out boldly to do the whole job—as though Aristotle had merely omitted to do it.

As bad as the state of affairs itself is that we do not know *why* it is so. Determining its causes may be equal to solving the theoretical problem itself, and as difficult. A speculation: each theory of comedy faces a double task—to account for comic forms, i.e., the laws of comic discourse, literary/dramatic/(filmic), and to account for the phenomenon of laughter, and of course to relate the two. Perhaps, in different ways, each theory of comedy has shattered or distended itself on this double task. The more successful theories, notably Freud's, tend to concentrate on one of the tasks and to ignore the other, though this entails incompleteness.

No theory can deal with both questions successfully; yet each must try to do so because the questions are linked. Producing laughter is a fundamental effect of comic discourse,* hence it is a part of the art of comedy writing, directing, acting, which no treatise can leave out. The two phenomena are linked but they seem to lie along different axes.

Henri Bergson's theory of comedy as the mechanical encrusted on the organic is exposed as simplistic by the case that it seems to fit best: Buster Keaton. The latter's creative mis-adaptation of objects to various survival needs is a positive evolutionary force. So is his turning his body into machines of various sorts to surmount various perils, such as becoming a pendulum to rescue his fiancée from a waterfall in *Our Hospitality*.

Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*[1] (1905) may well be the best book on the subject, but it limits itself to the simplest of comic discourses, the minimal unit of humor—the joke, epigram, or humorous remark. Hence it is of more limited value to our inquiry than might appear. A comic film such as *Bringing up Baby* (1938) contains many jokes and instances of humor in Freud's sense but is not reducible to them. Its construction, effects, humor operate on several levels at once. No single element may be understood by itself either discursively or in regard to spectator relation, only in relation to the multi-tiered whole. Although the book is one of his most brilliant, Freud was no more satisfied than the reader seeking a full treatment of comedy. James Strachey reports that Freud's other books of the period (*Interpretation of Dreams, Psychopathology of Everyday Life, Three Essays*) were expanded and modified almost out of recognition in their later editions. Half a dozen small additions were made to *Jokes* in 1912 but no further changes were ever made in it. References to it are rare in the other works, but in the *Introductory Lectures* he speaks of it having temporarily led him aside from his path; in the *Autobiographical Study* there is an apparent

*Dare one call laughter a rhetorical effect? No, because the figure may be written and no one laugh. In comedy we identify the figure with the effect—as though metaphor were dependent on audience effect to be that.

depreciatory reference to it. Twenty years later he returned to the problem with a short paper on "Humor" (1927), which recasts the subject by the metapsychological scheme id-ego-superego.

In the cases of practitioners Ben Jonson and Lope de Vega the *absence* of a theory of comedy became the foundation for their thinking on the subject. In Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humor* (1600) there occurs the following remarkable speech by Cordatus.

> No, I assure you, signor. If those laws you speak of had been delivered us *ab initio*, and in their present virtue and perfection, there had been some reason of obeying their powers; but 'tis extant that that which we call *Comoedia* was at first nothing but a simple and continued song sung by only one person, til Susario invented a second; after him, Epicharmus a third; Phormus and Chionides devised to have four actors, with a prologue and chorus; to which Cratinus, long after, added a fifth and sixth; Euppolis, more; Aristophanes, more than they; every man in the dignity of his spirit and judgment supplied something. And though that in him this kind of poem appeared absolute and fully perfected, yet how is the face of it changed since! in Menander, Philemon, Cecilius, Plautus, and the rest, who have utterly excluded the chorus, altered the property of the persons, their names, and natures, and augmented it with all liberty, according to the elegancy and disposition of those times wherein they wrote. I see not then, but we should enjoy the same license or free power to illustrate and heighten our invention as they did; and not be tied to those strict and regular forms which the niceness of a few, who are nothing but form, would thrust upon us.[2]

In his poem "The New Art of Making Comedies" (1609), Lope de Vega argued that popular comedy ignores rules.

> The true play like every kind of poetic composition has its proposed goal, and that has been to imitate the actions of men and to paint the customs of their age. Any poetic imitation is made up of three things: speech, rhythm, harmony or music. . . .
> For a subject tragedy has history and comedy has feigning; for this reason comedy was called flat-footed, of humble plot.[3]

2 Fifteen Kinds of Snow

> The Eskimos have special names for many different kinds of snow (fifteen, if I remember rightly) because variations in the quality of snow greatly affect their living . . . A different name for snow implies a different kind of hunt. Some names for snow imply that one should not hunt at all. —Kenneth Burke, "Literature as equipment for living."[4]

Romantic comedy: a genre, a family of genres (marriage, manners, screwball), a category of production and marketing, a category of analysis, a realm of specialties (Ernst Lubitsch, Gregory La Cava), a notion. Definition, even delimitation, is difficult or impossible because all Hollywood films (except some war films) have romance and all have comedy. We might specify "comic *about* the romance" but nearly always at least some of the comedy concerns some of the romance. A workable subset "romantic comedy" might refer to those films in which romance and comedy are the primary components or to those without other such components as crime, detection of crime, Western adventure, war, etc. But what is "primary" in a given case is difficult to determine where romance and comedy are pervasive. Moreover, even if crime, westerns, war, etc. films are eliminated, the remainder is vast and its modes of conjoining romance and comedy myriad.

3 Special Names

It may be that subdividing romantic comedy into its component types or genres will further analysis of it. The definition that is elusive might be easier to accomplish at a level of greater particularity. Let us take "screwball comedy," a term one finds in critical contexts of all sorts. Beneath the common term, however, there is no agreement, neither from critic to critic nor within the work of a single critic. The weekly critics use the term again and again without definition, implicit or explicit, or even an approximate sense. In the hands of its users, "screwball" seems to refer to a general impression of zaniness received by the critic.

A working definition is provided by Howard Hawks, in speaking of *Bringing up Baby*.

> I think the picture had a great fault and I learned an awful lot from it. There were no normal people in it. Everyone you met was a screwball. Since that time I have learned my lesson and I don't intend ever again to make everybody crazy. If the gardener had been normal, if the sheriff had been just a perplexed man from the country—but as it was they were all way off center.[5]

Hawks defines screwball comedy as a film in which everyone is a screwball. He seems to limit the category to one instance and claims to regret that as a mistake, but Hawks's definition does have to do with structural factors, not with im-

pressions of craziness. Its import is clarified by these observations on ancient comedy.

> The representation of manners always supposes some philosophy of conduct, some standard by which we judge, and some method of discovering it. Aristotle had only put it into form when he laid down his doctrine of the Mean. This doctrine is at the root of Theophrastus's *Characters*, and is everywhere implied by such comedies as Menander's. Virtue once admitted to be the mean, it became necessary to define all the extremes, the too little and too much of the social appearances of man.[6]

Against this backdrop screwball comedy is that which omits (or departs from) the philosophy of conduct traditional to comedy. In a comedy of characters who are all crazy, there can be no mean or standard. Even to say that all are in excess implies an external standard since there is no inner one.

But in what is called screwball comedy there often *is* comparative judgment of behavior and therefore at least an inchoate "philosophy of conduct." It is certainly not abstract like Aristotle's *Ethics*, it may be closer to Lévi-Straussian "savage thought," a thinking with empirical entities. In *The Awful Truth* and *His Girl Friday*, the Ralph Bellamy character is exemplar and exaggeration of conventional morality—both a character norm, against which to contrast the eccentricities of the leads, and a social norm, against which the film directs its satire. (These functions are not always embodied in a single character.) The main characters are screwballs in relation to him, but this is not mere madness, for it exemplifies the value of spontaneity, which reigns supreme in thirties romantic comedy, where it stands in for and includes wit, intelligence, genuine feeling vs. conventional response, adaptable moral response, vitality, life. In films without a Bellamy type, less prominent background figures such as policemen, judges, storekeepers, relatives perform one or both functions. In both films mentioned, the heroines plan to marry Bellamy at one point, which indicates that they waver between the two moralities.

Holiday would not be called a screwball comedy by most. The action is carefully plotted, emerges logically from consistent, well-motivated characters, etc. It is a well-made film of a well-made play. Yet the main characters Linda and Casey (and the Potters) are celebrated as some kind of screwballs in contrast to the convention-bound, predictable other characters. Its philosophy of conduct is clearcut, but it champions a pair of (semi-)screwballs. Is it a screwball comedy?

A different instance is Preston Sturges, in whose films all characters speak a heady, epigrammatic prose, improbable in all but a few cases. Probability is violated in this respect and in some outrageous plot twists (usually at the end), but there are few if any screwball characters if screwball means to *act* spontaneously and crazily. The dialogue is the main, usually the only crazy element. The actions, events, plots sometimes are rather conventional, predictable. The characters played by Joel McCrea, Henry Fonda, Eddie Bracken, even William Demarest are not "spontaneous." They perform no "flips" like Johnny Case in *Holiday* and hardly, if ever, run—as the characters in *Baby* do constantly. They rarely laugh, sigh, sing, or do slapstick like McCarey's characters. Mainly they exchange words—it is the words which flip, sigh, run, get out of breath. But at this level—the lines themselves are screwball. They may come out of any figure in the frame and very often express surprising sentiments. Character consistency is often sacrificed for a good speech—another screwball element (or is it?).

We have chased the notion of screwball around the clock of filmic elements. We went in one door and came out another—without encountering an iota of certainty or consistency, not even a vector between two points that pointed in a definite direction.

4

If we cannot define romantic comedy, can we talk about it at all? Aristotle says no. Wittgenstein says yes.

> Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all,—but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways. . . .
>
> Consider for example the proceedings that we call "games." I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic-games, and so on. What is common to them all?—Don't say "There *must* be something, or they would not be called 'games'"—but *look and see* whether there is anything common to all.—For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to

all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that . . . we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and crisscrossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail . . . I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than "family resemblances. . ."[7]

5

Romantic comedy is a family of resemblances. Filmic romantic comedy is one branch of that family but also, as we have seen, a family in itself with diverse sub-branches. Since the branches of romantic comedy include entire art forms and their traditions—ballet, drama, painting, novel, opera, poem, symphony—it is necessarily true that the differences among them, which are material, are greater than the similarities, which are semantic, abstract, thematic. (As is the heading "romantic comedy" itself.) This is why transformations of subjects or themes from one medium to another are never automatic and never equal and why they offer an excellent perspective on the signifying processes of both, especially on the second or receiving system, on which the burden of transformation falls.

Consider the oft-told story of Ben Hecht's adaptation of Noel Coward's *Design for Living*—what is its point? Hecht is said to have boasted that he had kept only one line of the original (or was it a line from *Hay Fever*?), but critics agree that the film is far inferior to the play, even those virtually uncrititical of Lubitsch's work. This story, like all Hollywood stories, emphasizes personalities, but far more important is the work process. Under the prevailing censorship, a woman could not live sexually with a man if they were not married, let alone two. The suggestion that Leo and Otto had been or were lovers was also inadmissable. The play (or its title, though even that no longer made sense) had to be turned toward an acceptable category, in this case competition between two men for a girl, with the twists that it remains cheerful to the end and that there is no final choice. For Hecht or any Hollywood writer the project was the same—to turn *Design for Living* into a romantic comedy.

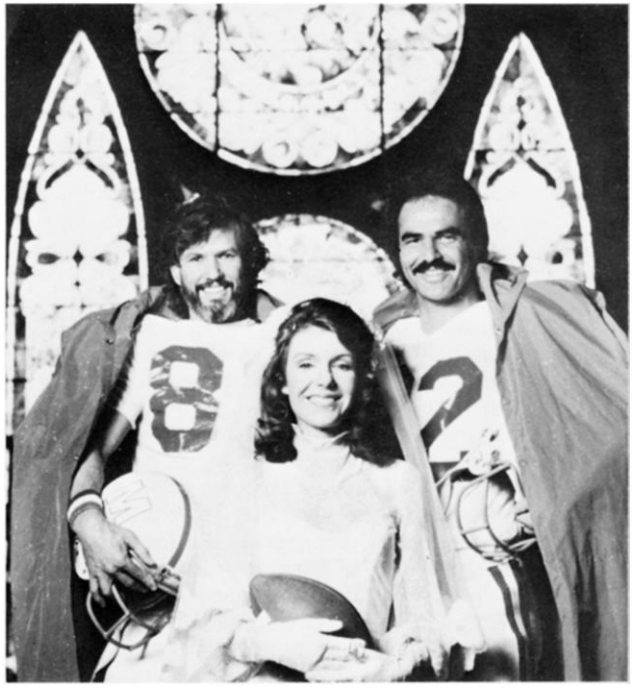
6

Semi-Tough (1972) is a non-romantic comedy,* a football/sex/Texas-boy novel (by Dan Jenkins) that is transformed into a romantic comedy of the same name (1977—written by Walter Bernstein, directed by Michael Ritchie) at a time when the concept of romantic comedy itself seems vaguely problematic, extinct, or transformed. Thus in considering this problem, we are defining and pursuing an equation with two unknowns. What is romantic comedy now? How is this particular non-romantic comedy transformed into one? There are also two (more or less) knowns that we may use—what romantic comedy used to be and what this non-romantic comedy was before transformation.

The novel *Semi-Tough* (1972) belongs to a tradition of vernacular fiction that goes back (at least) to Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885). The tradition is a popular one—at its beginnings opposed to high literature—and has often been a profitable one. Twain himself was a best-selling author and the Huck Finn formula—colorful (rural) characters recounting colorful adventures in a colorful idiom—has been the basis for countless books (and later films) including *True Grit, No Time for Sergeants, To Kill a Mockingbird, Little Big Man. Semi-Tough* too is narrated by its central character, Billy Clyde Puckett. His diction is far less distinct, region-specific, and consistent than Huck's because it is a composite of Texas-, New York-, and football-ese and because it developed in an age of media saturation of virtually all regions. Even so it is the vernacular narration of Billy Clyde and its interaction with the events recounted which organize the *enunciation* of the book and the reader's pleasure in reading it. Word choice, distinctive local constructions, dialects are far less important here than certain rhythms of spoken speech (more or less Texan) which strongly imply a listener and indeed, though not too forcibly, specific listener reactions. The reader is worked into these rhythms and laughs or whatever in the right places. When the words

*Of course the book has its own comedy and its own romance. These are transformed entirely in making it into a romantic comedy.

Top: The stage version of DESIGN FOR LIVING *[with Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne]. Below: The film version [Gary Cooper, Miriam Hopkins, Fredric March]. Right:* SEMI-TOUGH *[Kris Kristofferson, Jill Clayburgh, Burt Reynolds].*



are themselves funny, the effect is doubled. Like all good comic timing, it is the effect.

7

The book's plot recalls Twain also. Three childhood friends from Texas now live in New York—football pros and roommates Billy Clyde and Shake Tiller and ad woman Barbara Jane Bookman. Shake and Barbara Jane have been romantically involved since high school. The three are roughly equivalent to Huck, Tom and Becky Thatcher in *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn.*

Barbara Jane is from the highest class in the region just as Becky is the daughter of a judge. Tom is a middle-class boy, Huck a semi-orphan and outcast, a member of the lowest white class. So Shake's father owns a paint store while Billy Clyde is an orphan/outcast. "My daddy ran off before I ever knew him . . . My mamma was a waitress and maybe a couple of other things, and she ran off, too. Which left me with Uncle Kenneth, who was not much more than a golf hustler, a pool shark and a pretty good gin rummy stud."

We ask the question that is fundamental to literary semiotics, New Criticism, and various old criticisms: how does the first-person narration and vernacular idiom interact with the story? (On this point alone *Huck Finn* leaves the others far behind.) Billy Clyde's perspective and diction are used mainly to add salt to the games, orgies, New York and Texas types that he describes. (Similarly his outcast status is a childhood note that has virtually no effect on the rest of the book.) There is a possible exception. The book builds to a double climax of pre-game orgy and Super-Bowl. But there is a third climax concerning the dawning of love between Billy Clyde and Barbara Jane. This "new hermeneutic" is introduced before the telling of the game and finished later. Billy Clyde tells of Shake's not appearing after the game and of Barbara Jane's suggestions after a while that they get together. He also narrates his own refusals, continued even when Shake writes them to get together, without comment. She guesses what he might be thinking, occasionally he says what he is thinking in dialogue, but he never speaks it directly as narrator. This device is familiar from Hemingway and others. The first-person narration creates tension and defines character (and sometimes an ethics or a metaphysical position) by what it does not say, by its avoidance of areas or topics to which it has access. At the end of his account—during which he is presumably working through the taboos inhibiting him, Billy Clyde describes their finally hitting the right mood and beginning to make love, then stops.

*PLOT SUMMARY: Barbara Jane returns from a several-month absence. During this time Shake has gotten heavily into

8

The film drops nearly all of the book's football and casual sex and all of its material about the characters' shared childhood. It makes the three friends roommates. It eliminates the love relationship between Shake and Barbara Jane—none of the three has apparently had sex with another when the film opens. This has been called the film's *Design for Living* premise, but it is not that. In the play the three try each of three possible pairings before they go off to live as three at the final curtain. The initial arrangement of *Semi-Tough* is merely a set-up for romantic comedy of a more usual sort—a competition of two men for a woman that will favor first one then the other.*

The film has no narrator, no voice-over, it presents the action objectively. Billy Clyde's book project is retained as a narrative episode—a few scenes show him writing and taping. This has only to do with the enounced (the told) whereas the taping is the enunciation principle of the entire book as well as sometimes part of the enounced, as when Billy Clyde describes himself speaking to the recorder, etc. The film plays Gene Autry songs almost constantly, sometimes diegetically when the characters play them, listen to them and react, sometimes non-diegetically over a football game, etc. Perhaps the ubiquitous voice of Autry, with its recurring "I" and "I'm," stands in for the absent narrational voice of Billy Clyde as a displaced principle of enunciation.

BEAT—"it changed my life." This change precipitates changes in the other characters and their relationships and leads to all the events of the plot. Barbara Jane admires Shake's new self-mastery, they become closer, by the next road game they are sleeping together. Billy Clyde's distress is expressed in various ways (to the audience only), though the exact cause is unclear. He counter-attacks by proposing to write a book but he blows this bid for her esteem by making a joke of it. At the next game week, Shake saves a life through BEAT, Barbara Jane's anxiety at the event becomes hysterical admiration for Shake, and they decide to marry. At this Billy Clyde drops the book and carries the battle to the enemy's territory by faking his way through a BEAT weekend and pretending to have IT, just as Barbara Jane suffers through to please Shake and does not get IT. During the wedding preparations Billy Clyde plays off Shake's anxieties that a "mixed marriage" will not work; Shake says "I don't" at the altar, the ceremony becomes a brawl, Billy Clyde and Barbara Jane escape. He says they should go to Hawaii, they walk together down the beach.

9

> He (Philip Barry) was a subtle writer, but nothing muddy about him. A clarity at the back of it all. I don't like muddiness, I like clarity. It has nothing to do with being literal, and it doesn't cut out mystery—of course, there are times when you don't want to say everything—but I like to know that I can look into the pool of water when I want to and find it clear at the bottom.
>
> —George Cukor, *On Cukor*[8]

Would sophisticated characters walk into this drama-machine so naively or be so surprised by pitfall No. 1, sexual jealousy? The book's characters might discuss the proposal amusingly but each would vote no at the end. The film begins with three friendships and moves to one love match then to another. What is the nature and strength of the friendships, of the loves, how and why do they arise or fall apart when they do? On these points the film is unclear.

When do Billy Clyde's feelings for Barbara Jane change—before she returns from Africa? An early line "love me or leave me alone" suggests yes but if so how far back do they go and why hasn't he acted on them? When the Shake-Barbara Jane romance starts Billy Clyde is evidently unhappy but why—exclusion by friends, jealousy of Barbara Jane, sex rivalry with Shake or slow-ripening love for Barbara Jane quickened by the pressure of events? These are confused or insufficiently differentiated—Billy Clyde's quest remains ambiguous.

Friendship is partway established between Shake and Barbara Jane and between Billy Clyde and Barbara Jane but not between the two men. Though they are said to be old and close friends, what we see is Billy Clyde competing with Shake ruthlessly for Barbara Jane. "Nobody ever said it wasn't going to be semi-tough." The book's line and title refer to the Super-Bowl. In the film Billy Clyde speaks the line to himself about breaking up the wedding and winning Barbara Jane. Thus the film's displacement of competition from sport to love and its elimination of friendship and teamwork.

10

Basic to romantic comedy is the dyad old love/new love. Nearly all romantic comedies may be divided according to it. *Bringing Up Baby, Holiday,* etc. treat new love; *The Awful Truth, His Girl Friday, Twentieth Century,* etc. treat old love. *The Philadelphia Story* treats both, though the new is only a flash, as do most films by Lubitsch.

Semi-Tough is a story of new love and of new rivalries for it, wherein ruthlessness, stunts and dissembling are traditional. But when a story of new love is laid over a story of old friendship the results are unsavory and unattractive. Were Cary Grant the close friend and work partner of Ralph Bellamy, his taunts and ruses would not be so funny. A work that faced squarely this disturbing mixture and its consequences might well be interesting. But if it insists on the new love quest and sweeps the residues under the rug, as this film does, then the viewer will be confused and disturbed at the end, perhaps without knowing why. This happens here when the hero is shown triumphant in love, but his friend lies slain by him just offscreen.

11

Friendship must be established and built, not just posited, even if (especially if) the friends later fall out over a love object. This is proven by the films of Hawks and Ford, among others, as it is by Coward's *Design for Living.*

In *Semi-Tough* both friendship and love are posited abstractly. We must infer Billy Clyde's love for Barbara Jane from his writing and disrupting the wedding, not from the way the two relate to each other onscreen. Their confrontations, in brief, tangential scenes, are awkward. Another "obligatory" scene that is missing is one between Shake and Billy Clyde confronting the issue of Barbara Jane. As BEAT follower Shake might propose the talk, though follow through glibly. Billy Clyde might become tense or refuse to take it seriously or actually speak his feelings. How it was done would not matter, their usual banter would suffice, so long as it were banter under pressure.

Another posit: Billy Clyde is said to like only fucking and football but neither liking is shown. He has two meager sexual encounters—why only this for an alleged stud? Because even a semi-intense scene between Billy Clyde and a woman might throw off his alleged passion for Barbara

Jane and the campaign he is mounting to fulfill it. (In very skillful hands such a scene could be used to clarify his feelings for Barbara Jane.) In all these respects the film lives a life of denial to protect its house of cards premise. It might have been better to accept the weakness of the premise and go after some old-fashioned character interaction. In this way the premise might have been abandoned or rediscovered or changed or developed.

It is true that some classic films present love indirectly—to be consistent with hard-bitten heroes and/or the conflict of strong egos too proud to submit to love. This is the case in scripts by Jules Furthman, especially those directed by von Sternberg and Hawks (*Morocco, Shanghai Express, Only Angels Have Wings, To Have and Have Not, Rio Bravo,* etc.). Each of these films presents the love attraction early and with great vividness, often in great set pieces, so that later when we see the characters choking on the attraction as it slowly turns to love, we know what they are choking on. Furthman's law is that the hero cannot say "I love you"—hence the messages on mirrors, carvings on tables, two-headed coins, threatened handbills, tickets for the morning stage, bus, plane and boat. But the attraction has to be felt viscerally first if the later doubts, hesitations, betrayals, the goings back and forth, and the complex movement toward resolution are to make sense, have dramatic impact and emotional force. Otherwise one creates a set of logical complications that have no referent, the plot gets more and more abstract as it doubles over, achieves new levels of tangles in relation to its basic love premise—it refers to nothing in the viewer's emotional memory of the film. Of course this is a fine strategy for modernist films which proceed systematically, like Marguerite Duras's *Woman of the Ganges* and Yvonne Rainer's films, but we are not speaking of that here.

12 Heroine

At the start of the film, film and book Barbara Jane seem close—the changes do not seem to matter, but if we compare them at the end of the film, the difference is enormous. At the end, Barbara Jane has just come close to a third marriage, been spurned by Shake, and hustled away by Billy Clyde. It dawns on her slowly that she has been a fool about Shake (going against her nature to learn BEAT), and that Billy Clyde has contrived to break up the wedding, therefore he must love her. She asks him "Do you want to marry me?" When he says no and suggests a trip to Hawaii, she asks like a child, "What will we do there?" The last-minute rescue from a bad wedding is a fixture of romantic comedy, but the pathetic dependence of the heroine on the rescuer is not. In thirties comedies the heroine might turn on her benefactor at rescue point and strip him of his pretensions. In *Morgan!*(1966), Vanessa Redgrave laughs at the disorder caused by her psychotic rescuer, and is thereby complicit in it. Even *The Graduate* (1967) does a better wedding breakup by playing it as drama rather than comedy and by having the heroine come to the hero. (When will we see a film in which the woman does the rescuing?) In *Semi-Tough* the heroine does nothing after the rescue except to be catatonic. We do not notice this on first viewing because the wedding brawl creates a slight sense of breathlessness that almost lasts through the final scene. The latter is very short anyway but is made to seem longer through a trick. The new couple takes a long slow walk down the beach as the camera watches them, a shot that continues as the credits come up. This fills out a sense of time while providing no new information or emotion. The hollowness of the film's romantic comedy premise surfaces here.

Billy Clyde's break-up and refusal may be meant to cure Barbara Jane of her marriage compulsion. He may sense that she marries knowing it will not work, therefore he will live with her to make their relationship last. This is a kindly guess as the script supplies few clues. Nor are there enough to evaluate such a supposition on Billy Clyde's part. In any case it implies a psychiatrist-patient or parent-child relation, not a romantic comedy one.

The final scene marks the collapse of the filmic Barbara Jane—it reveals that there never was a character at all. With her collapse, the film collapses. There can be no romantic comedy without strong heroines.

13

> He'd [Jules Furthman] been writing a thing for Bacall for an introduction—really good scene, where she'd had her purse stolen. He said, "What do you think of it?" and I said, "Well, Jules, if anything makes me sexually excited it's a girl who's lost her purse." And he looked bemused and began to stare at me. "You son of a bitch," he said, and he walked out. And he came in and he wrote a story about how the girl stole a purse. Made a lot better picture.
>
> —Howard Hawks[9]

We need not review Hegel on the master-slave dialectic or Simone de Beauvoir on the man-woman dialectic to observe that a fictive mode that debases the heroine thereby debases the hero also and thereby subverts itself. We note also that the novel's Barbara Jane is strong, independent, and virtually equal to her two friends. It is she who pursues Billy Clyde at the end, as the mate she believes best for her. The long last chapter concerns the overcoming of Billy Clyde's reservations. This makes the film's transformations especially alarming. As an answer to the question "What is romantic comedy now?" it is even more alarming.

Romantic comedy posited men and women willing to meet on a common ground and to engage all their faculties and capacities in sexual dialectic. Later work such as the Kanin-Gordon-Cukor films brought work, political dispute, and psychological complications to this engaged ground and extended the age range of its participants. What we begin to see now in films is a withdrawal of men and women from this ground (or of it from them). Or we see—in effect the same thing—false presences in the sexual dialectic or divided ones (one realizes at the end that one did not want to play the game at all) or commitments for trivial stakes only. It seems that when the new self pulls itself together, it is away from the ground of full sexual dialectic. To argue this is to argue the death of romantic comedy.

14 King Sun

One need not subscribe to any theory of art as mimesis to recognize that social and political changes have transformed the making and reception of romantic comedy since the classical period. These changes are vast, complex, interwoven, and not yet sufficiently understood in themselves to permit application to subtopics like our own. This is true even if we limit ourselves to changes in the family and in sexual life: the doubling of the divorce rate in the last decade, the rise of the single parent, the political and social impact of feminist movements and gay rights movements, etc. One factor, the rise of working women, has been called "a revolution in the roles of women that . . . is a worldwide phenomenon, an integral part of a changing society. Its secondary and tertiary consequences are really unchartable."[10] The striking fact is how little these changes have made their way into films of any kind, comedies, dramas, or documentaries.

We will discuss another factor, perhaps a simpler one, the sharply increased movement of the American population from (Eastern) cities to the Sunbelt in the last ten years. Since 1970 the nation's eight largest metropolitan areas have declined in population growth. This development stands in contrast with practically all preceding periods since 1790. The more rapid growths of large urban concentrations as compared to non-metropolitan territory has been one of the most persistent of American demographic trends. Five of the eight areas had a net loss of population during this period.

During the next 15 years there will be a pronounced shift of income away from the Northeast and North Central regions of the country to the Southern and Western regions. "The question is not so much one of decline but one of: Can the Northeast age gracefully?"[11]

The romantic comedy has always been urban and urban-oriented, aggressively, smugly assuming the superiority of city over country. This pattern of thought and response is old and deep in US culture and European too. It characterizes the great age of industrialism and capitalist expansion, which is now beginning to be over.

In sophisticated films and plays, the sticks were always ridiculed, especially the visitor from the sticks, and the immigrant to the city from the country. The full fury of urban scorn was vented on those who retained any narcissistic pride in the provinces. The immigrant had to adapt to capitalism and its life ways in a hurry. *The Awful Truth:* "What's wrong with Oklahoma City?" "Nothing, Bruce, nothing." Jokes based on urban

superiority had an unquestioned sense for audiences for 180 years and more that they are beginning not to have. What sense does Walter Burns's put-down of Albany make (in *His Girl Friday*) now that New York City is dependent on Albany for survival?

What a cinema of the Sunbelt will be we do not know. (Perhaps *Badlands* [1974] and *Three Women* [1977] are versions of this. "The silence of those infinite spaces terrifies me. —Pascal.)

15 Enunciation

Enunciation signifies the act of uttering a message. It is opposed to *enoncé* which signifies what is uttered. The system of enunciation which governs particular acts of enunciation is in turn governed by the semiotic system involved—which creates a limited number of enunciation possibilities—and by historical, social and other contextual factors. French linguist Emile Benveniste distinguishes two distinct and complementary systems of enunciation, that of story (*l'histoire*) and that of discourse (*discours*). In language these systems divide up all verb tenses between them—what does not belong to discourse (only the aorist) belongs to history.

> The historical utterance . . . characterizes the narration of past events. These three terms "narration," "event," and "past," are of equal importance. Events that took place at a certain moment of time are presented without any intervention of the speaker in the narration. In order for them to be recorded as having occurred, these events must belong to the past.[12]

> Discourse must be understood in its widest sense: every utterance assuming a speaker and a hearer, and in the speaker, the intention of influencing the other in some way. It is primarily every variety of oral discourse of every nature and every level . . . But it is also the mass of writing that reproduces oral discourse or that borrows its manner of expression and its purposes: correspondence, memoirs, plays, didactic works, in short, all the genres in which someone addresses himself to someone, proclaims himself as the speaker, and organizes what he says in the category of person.[13]

Histoire suppresses or hides all traces of its telling, it refers neither to speaker or listener but only to the events it relates. The effects of different modes of enunciation on the receiver is a complex, largely uncharted area, but it is clear that *histoire* in general is used to make the events related seem more real, vivid, present, whereas, *discours* modes continually break such illusions, or at least may do so.

Applying these concepts in film analysis creates several problems, the first of which is that films are apparently perceived as told in the present. That in any case is its most transparent mode, and in this it resembles *histoire*. Romantic comedies of all decades belong to this mode. They are dramatic—they present what is happening now, without mediation. Pace and timing are important and a sense that the characters are under pressure and must react quickly. Lines of dialogue are delivered fast, often unexpectedly, and must be countered fast. Of course this is carefully engineered illusion, but it is the impression which romantic comedy must create if it is to achieve the effects which define it.

Related to this enunciative mode is a thematic constant of romantic comedy (at least in the thirties)—an ethos of spontaneity. Not only are lines of dialogue rendered spontaneously, so are physical actions. We see Johnny Case's excited face and rising inflections in *Holiday* and suddenly he does a "flip," lands on his feet, utters a few more lines and goes out the door. Any evidence of enunciation in this passage would ruin the effect of the scene. Imagine a *film noir* (like *Raw Deal* [1949]) with ghostly voice-over, eerie music, expressionist lighting, webbed, tangled mise-en-scène: "I did a flip on my way out the door. As I stood there looking at my friends it seemed to me that everything was upside down. The room was going round and round . . . I knew that I had to get to Helen, who was waiting in the car, but I could not move." The example is ridiculous, I beg your indulgence, but it should make clear the difference between enunciation that is heavily marked and enunciation that is transparent and—very roughly—the kinds of subjects traditionally appropriate to each. (*Film noir* is especially interesting because its plethora of signifier chains, its multichanneled redundancy, works as often to pull the viewer in—i.e., the film naturalizes itself as "complex world"—as to distance the viewer.)

Works of *histoire* suppress signs of enunciation, but no work can do this completely. The analyst must look more carefully in such cases but all

works betray signs of their telling. *Baby*'s first close-up, about a third of the way through, shows us Susan's distress at hearing that David is to be married. This shot betrays a previously transparent discourse—someone is showing us this detail, is marking it as important (so that we will understand Susan's behavior later). In *The Awful Truth* there is a gap after Bellamy departs—an affair for Jerry is needed in a hurry so that Lucy may play disrupter and the film continue. The film presents a rather typical montage of society column excerpts, shots of the couple at racetrack, watching polo, motorboating, etc., before the music dies down and the next funny scene starts. Here it is the banality of the presentation, the simplicity and obviousness of the message, the tediousness of its "process" that call attention to the enunciation, as well as its marked difference from the rest of the film and its odd placement in its late middle. Perhaps also the switching from dramatic/improvisational to narrational mode and from a constant use of scenes to a bracket syntagm. Thus a passage's difference from a film's principal mode of enunciation can mark one mode of transparent enunciation from its fellows.

Romantic comedy's banishment of enunciation marks is reflected in *Semi-Tough* too. The book has an interesting enunciation structure: not only a first person but a second person too. Billy Clyde narrates the book to Jim Tom, a reporter friend who will edit it. Every so often he asks Jim Tom if he's listening and tells him what to disregard if he wishes etc. At times he speculates alone or in imaginary colloquy with Jim Tom what the publisher's editor is likely to think. Billy Clyde sometimes describes himself taping, the presence of others while he's taping; he also has to account for all his comings and goings which relate to the taping—why he can tape now, etc. And of course he cannot both play football and narrate what is happening on the field. This requires continual maneuver. The film eliminates these complexities in one stroke, opting for the dramatic mode of entirely present action and dialogue rather than narration. In doing so it maximizes the values of spontaneity and vividness and diminishes those of perspective, layering, temporal and presentational complexity. In short it adopts the enunciative mode that has always been obligatory for romantic comedy. This dictates in part the transformation pattern that romantic comedy imposes on its diverse materials—which is to say that it is part of the definition of romantic comedy.

16

At one point in *Semi-Tough* the heroine says to the hero, "How come we never fucked?" It is arguable that romantic comedy depends upon the suppression of this question and that with its surfacing romantic comedy becomes impossible.

The sexual question always circulates in romantic comedy, it is its utterance that is forbidden. On this prohibition romantic comedy stands. Indeed one can see the entire spectrum of romantic comedy as so many variations on this unuttered question. In comedies of old love, the unspoken question is "Why did we stop fucking?" In comedies of new love, it is "Why don't we fuck now?" There is a virtual Freudian declension system operating here, the terms of which define the principal modes of romantic comedy.*

It seems, then, that the various modes of romantic comedy posit a condition of non-fucking. In comedies of new love this is the initial situation; the plot extends it by prolonging aversion or indifference, by mistaken identity, and/or by a repetition of frustrating encounters, etc. Old love comedies posit a cessation of fucking, due to suspected infidelity (*The Awful Truth*), to "leaving the newspaper business to settle down" (*His Girl Friday*), or whatever. In comedies of both kinds it is the entire film, but no line in it, that poses and explores the question "Why are we not fucking?" and "How can we get (back) to fucking?" Romantic comedy lives on the problem of non-fucking and is over when, and only when, it is resolved, when fucking (re)starts. This is explicit in *The Awful Truth*, when the boy and girl figures on the clock finally go through the same door, just before "The End;" and in *It Happened One Night*, when the "Walls of Jericho" come down at the same moment. These films end just as the

*From his analyses of Schreber's memoirs, Freud concluded that the principal forms of paranoia can all be represented as contradictions of the single proposition: "I (a man) love him (a man)," and that they exhaust all the possible ways in which such contradictions can be formulated.

characters begin to fuck. In *Holiday* and other films, the film ends as the characters "go off" together, marking the same occasion less literally. *Semi-Tough* concludes this way, but the overall film is muddied because the characters are childhood friends—it is the story both of new love complications and of exploring an old bar, "Why haven't we ever fucked?" In fact the second question is not explored—beyond a throwaway from Billy Clyde about how they had meant too much to each other for "fun" sex along the way.

An exception: Lubitsch's *One Hour With You* (a remake of *The Marriage Circle*) is a romantic comedy about a happy couple. Of course the plot turns on a slow-building threat to the marriage, but it breaks them up for only a short time (one night) before they get back together.

Note that in romantic comedy resolution of the problem of non-fucking involves both a theoretic question and a pragmatic one (as in psychoanalysis). Determining why we are not fucking and overcoming the barrier by actually fucking are quite different things, though romantic comedies and their characters consistently confuse them. The theoretic answer to the question does not necessarily lead to the desired result and achievement of the desired result does not necessarily imply that the theoretic question has been answered. Perhaps it is anxiety over the problem and the desire for its pragmatic overcoming, both overdetermined, that are the mainspring of the genre. Seeking theoretic knowledge is one solution among others that are tried, with no very strict housekeeping as to which one actually works. For one thing, there is not the time, patience or mental calm necessary to try one solution at a time—the notion itself is comic (though not romantic)—all are tried at once. This is a realm in which "savage thought" and *bricolage* dominate, despite a surface appearance of rationality.

Although romantic comedy is about fucking and its absence, this can never be said nor referred to directly. This is perhaps the fascination of romantic comedy. It implies a process of perpetual displacement, of euphemism and indirection at all levels, a latticework of dissembling and hiding laid over what is constantly present but denied, unspoken, unshown. We perceive the sublimation system and the thing itself at every point, a system of repression suffused with a libidinal glow. In "Humor" (1927) Freud defined humor (as opposed to jokes) as proceeding from the super-ego, in reward for a survival-enhancing act or attitude.

Language in romantic comedy has a special status. What stands between sexual desire and its fulfillment is language. In romantic comedy language is the medium in which all things occur, arise and are discharged or not. Visual metaphors like figures on a clock and walls trumpeted down, and actions such as "going off" are resorted to for the absolutely unsayable. In romantic comedy, it is the past sex lives of the characters and present sexual problems that constitute a referent that cannot be named directly. *Angel* and *The Awful Truth*, both concerned with the possible infidelity of a marriage partner, cleverly make the enunciative conditions of romantic comedy the predicament of the inquiring characters—they have only indirect, oblique signs to interpret. Also in both the question is never resolved, for the character or for us. The enunciation system is inscribed by displacement in the plot. Lubitsch's dollies into and static shots of closing bedroom doors do the same thing at a different level.

The effective prohibitions of romantic comedy are prohibitions within language. It is this that makes speaking the question "Why haven't we ever fucked?" destructive of romantic comedy. It wrecks the language-game on which it rests. In that game you can refer to anything but cannot speak of it. (See again the works of Lubitsch.)

The first reason that *Semi-Tough* says "How come we never fucked?" is that it can say it. In the thirties such language and such linguistic reference were prohibited—you could not say "Why haven't we ever made love?" either. That you can say something does not mean that you must do so. But has any realm of art invented for itself a system of censorship not imposed upon it? On this ground alone, it may be that romantic comedy is not an art that can flourish in this period.

NOTES

1. Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, tr. James Strachey, New York, 1960.

2. Ben Jonson, reprinted in *Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden*, Detroit, 1962, at p. 534, pp. 537-38.
3. Lope de Vega, reprinted in *ibid.*, at 540, pp. 542-3.
4. Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, New York, 1957, pp. 253-254.
5. Interview with Howard Hawks by Peter Bogdanovich, MOVIE No. 5, p. 11.
6. G.S. Gordon, "Theophrastus and His Imitators", in G.S. Gordon (Ed.), *English Literature and the Classics*, New York, 1969, p. 53.
7. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, New York, 1958, pp. 31e-32e.
8. Gavin Lambert, *On Cúkor*, New York, 1972, p. 123.
9. Interview with Howard Hawks by Peter Lehman et. al., *Wide Angle*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Summer 1976), p. 57.
10. New York Times, "Vast Changes in Society Traced to the Rise of Working Women," November 29, 1977, p. 1 and p. 28.
11. New York Times, "Influx of Population Down in Urban Areas," June 16, 1975, p. 1, p. 17.
12. Benveniste, Emile, *Problems in General Linguistics*, tr. Mary Elizabeth Meek, Coral Gables, 1971, p. 206.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 208-9.

WILLIAM R. MAGRETTA AND
JOAN MAGRETTA

Bertrand Tavernier: The Constraints of Convention

The recent release in this country of *The Clockmaker* (1973) and *Let Joy Reign Supreme* (1974), the first films of French critic-turned-director Bertrand Tavernier, reveals a major and surprisingly mature talent. These works fill what he sees as a need for polemical films, especially those "where the polemical unfolds at an everyday level." This concern with the polemics—and the politics—of everyday life is a quality that defines a new generation of promising young European directors, among them Tavernier, Tanner, Goretta, and Fassbinder. This post-1968 generation is characterized by their synthesis of the traditional humanistic film, with its emphasis on character and "the everyday," and the political film, with its emphasis on ideology and the extraordinary event.

What sets Tavernier apart from the others in this group is his interest in the kind of genre film that was for so long the staple of the motion picture industry. As an interviewer and critic for *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Positif*, and as a freelance press agent, Tavernier promoted the American genre film. As a director, he has demonstrated that in skillful hands the conventional structures of the genre film can be made to serve the original purposes of the *film d'auteur*. But further than this, Tavernier uses popular genres to explore the very nature of convention itself, to deepen our awareness of the way conventions—social, political, aesthetic—define not only what we can do and who we can be, but also how and what we can know. In particular, it is the constraints of convention that are the major concerns of these two films: *The Clockmaker*, a police story based on a Simenon novel, explores the social and political constraints of convention in contemporary society, whereas *Let Joy Reign Supreme*, an eighteenth-century costume film derived largely from historical accounts, probes the epistemological constraints inherent in the various genres of historical discourse.[1]

The Clockmaker is about a middle-aged and middle-class widower named Michel Descombes (Philippe Noiret), whose apparently ordinary and orderly life is destroyed when he learns suddenly that his teenage son, Bernard, has murdered a man. The victim, Razon, was a right-wing informant in the factory where Bernard's girlfriend, Liliane, worked. The young couple are pursued offscreen while in Lyons, Police Inspector Guiboud (Jean Rochefort) keeps Descombes informed about the progress of the manhunt. But Guiboud's interest in Descombes is more than professional, for he, too, is a father who seeks to understand his children. The complex relationship between the two men provides the dramatic center for the film: Descombes comes gradually to an awareness that the seemingly sympathetic Guiboud is his antagonist. The Police Inspector is, in fact, the

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embodiment of a subtly oppressive institutional world which Descombes learns must be opposed.

This central clash between Descombes and Guiboud, between individual and conventional, is set against a journey motif that gives the film a linear form. The film opens with a shot of a train hurtling through the darkness towards Lyons. The camera then circles a car which is burning mysteriously near the tracks. The burning car, which we later learn belonged to Razon, is the visual correlative of Bernard's violent act. This sight jolts Descombes out of his complacency and forces him to question everything that had seemed secure. The painful mental journey he undertakes is suggested by the recurring visual motif of the dark passage: when, en route to learn of Bernard's crime, Descombes is driven through a tunnel; when Descombes talks about Bernard's childhood while walking through a gloomy pedestrian underpass; when Descombes and Guiboud take a night train to the scene of the arrest; when Descombes arrives before dawn for his first plane ride (significantly, it is light when the plane takes off—father and son are reunited). At the end of the film, a train is arriving. The camera pans to reveal the Lyons station, the emptiness of which suggests repose rather than desolation. The film's final image of daylight streaming through the beautiful grillwork of the station roof conveys a sense of positive completion to the journey that began with the opening image.

While Razon's car burns, Descombes, unaware of what his son is doing, dines with a group of friends at a neighborhood bistro. The men joke about the defeat of the Left in the elections, and about plans to reinstate capital punishment and televise the executions. Descombes is jocular, witty, more interested in the play of words than in their substance. Walking home with his leftist friend Antoine, Descombes, a law-abiding citizen, refuses to cross a street against the light, even though there is no car in sight. Later, when a pair of hired thugs from the factory smash the window of Descombes's shop, he orders Antoine to drive through a red light in order to catch them. This incident is decisive for Descombes: if the respectable institution of business violates the law, then the existing order of things becomes meaningless. Once the social contract is broken, even red lights lose their significance.

If at the beginning of the film Descombes is able to joke about televising executions, by the end of his ordeal he has learned that TV and the other mass media are no laughing matter. In seeking to communicate with everyone at once, they communicate nothing at all. The "news" can never be really new; it can only transmit convention and stereotype—what is already known.

Before barging in on Descombes, the reporter Costes has his assistant photograph Razon's burnt car. Costes observes cynically that such a sight will "grab the hearts" of his readers, and even though he knows that Bernard was not political, he is pleased to think that the photo will arouse anti-leftist sentiments. Here Tavernier relies on framing to comment on Costes. Behind the car and the reporters, an ugly factory belches out black smoke. This reality Costes ignores, ready as he is to distort Bernard's act by taking it out of context. We see this again when Costes finds in Bernard's room a family heirloom used by a great uncle for making contraband matches. Descombes explains that the man was eventually caught because the phosphorous stuck to his shoes and made sparks when he walked. Costes seizes on this as a usable, because conventional, explanation for Bernard's act—he was trying to emulate the criminal "hero of the family." Descombes patiently corrects him. His son has never been a hero-worshipper. Descombes cooperates with Costes in order to protect Bernard, but he has begun to understand how the media destroy individuals in order to create types. In a later scene, as a newscast on a restaurant television set jabbers about Bernard, Descombes senses that he has been recognized by a respectable-looking woman in the next booth. As he leaves, he angrily thrusts his face at her and shouts, "The Murderer's Father, Madame." Descombes has begun to feel what Antoine later verbalizes, that they're "suffocating in this country," strangled by the very institutions that were made to serve them.

Like the mass media, the legal establishment appears to be more interested in conventional lies than in individual integrity. The fashionable defense attorney Descombes hires can't understand that Bernard killed Razon because he was "filth," because the boy was sick of "the same ones always winning." So instead the lawyer constructs the most conventional of all defenses: the

murder was a crime of passion. He is dumbfounded when Bernard refuses to cooperate with this lie and astounded when Descombes agrees with his son.

It is through his contact with the reporters and the lawyer that Descombes comes to perceive Guiboud as his antagonist. Not only is Guiboud, the policeman, the guardian of all that is conventional, but he is also the embodiment of the conventional attitudes exemplified by the representatives of the media and the legal profession.[2] This link is made explicit through consistent parallels. The scene in which a reporter plays on Descombes's love for his son in order to convince him to issue a radio appeal to Bernard to surrender is immediately followed by a sequence in which Guiboud makes a similar proposal. Moreover, Descombes comments pointedly on the similarity. When the lawyer mistakenly answers the wrong telephone on his desk, a comic failure of communication, we are reminded of the earlier scene in Guiboud's office when a woman trying to reach her butcher got him instead. And in his last meeting with Descombes, Guiboud urges that they pursue the idea that Bernard's crime was done to revenge Razon's supposed rape of Liliane. He has gone the lawyer one better. The distance between Guiboud and Descombes here is emphasized by presenting their conversation in alternating reverse-angle shots—they no longer share the frame as they typically did in their earlier encounters. When Descombes gets up to leave, we know that his dismissal of Guiboud is final.

The central oppositions represented by Descombes and Guiboud are shown most clearly when they meet one afternoon in a Lyons park. It is Guiboud who has arranged the meeting and it is significant that he waits for Descombes in front of the monument to the dead. The camera pans from the word "MORTS" carved in stone to Guiboud telling Descombes that he should have remarried after his wife left him, that what Bernard needed was the presence of a woman. Descombes replies quietly, "So I've been told," as if he has heard this bit of conventional wisdom many times over the years. But we have seen Descombes's tenderness and concern for his son, and we know that Guiboud's pronouncement is as dead as the stone monument in the background. After the two men walk to another part of the park and pause before a field of young deer, vital and unrestrained, it is Descombes who speaks. Shortly after his wife left him, a child he'd never seen before ran up to him, told him he'd changed, and then ran off. Descombes finds this marvelous, a sign of the child's love. Guiboud, on the other hand, is irritated by what he interprets as the child's rudeness and remembers when he was the object of a similar impertinence. Once, on a trolley, a child told its mother that Guiboud smelled bad. Tavernier says in an interview that this incident, which actually happened to one of his co-scenarists, Jean Aurenche, contains "the moral of the film, it summarizes the relationship between these two men." Descombes is vital, spontaneous, rebellious; Guiboud is dead, rigid, conventional. The sequence ends with a juxtaposition of two shots which underline the opposition of the two men: after they part, Guiboud is seen descending a stairway, and Descombes is seen ascending.

The progress of *The Clockmaker* is marked by Descombes's gradual isolation from the rest of society, by his rejection of conventions which he sees to be dishonest, unjust, and dehumanizing. Whereas Guiboud is officially charged with the job of tracking down the criminal, there is a sense in which Descombes is the real detective in this film, a very private eye patiently and meticulously sifting through the evidence and scrutinizing clues. He goes to talk to Madeleine, a woman who had cared for Bernard until he was six. It pains Descombes to learn that Madeleine has had news from Bernard where he has had none, that she has met Liliane and he has not. Her ramshackle garden seems to be the one island of

Phillippe Noiret and Jean Rochefort: THE CLOCKMAKER.

greenery left in urban Lyons, the kind of haven that children need. They are planning to tear down her house, she says, in order to build a hospital—more institutional concrete. At the same time that Descombes defines himself negatively by his opposition to the institutional world of Guiboud, he begins to forge a positive identity by embracing Madeleine, and finally, Bernard.

Tavernier's treatment of Bernard's trial is brilliantly elliptical. The camera looks up at Descombes as he proclaims his solidarity with his son. That is all that we see or hear because that is all that matters. Later, Descombes makes his first visit to Bernard in jail. At first, they wonder how they can talk with so much noise around them. Bernard is behind bars, but photographed in such a way that his face is unobstructed; his father is shot through a restraining grill. After the first few awkward moments while they struggle to communicate, Bernard tells his father that he must learn to articulate, that in the end we hear only what interests us. Descombes then recounts how he once disobeyed a ridiculous order during the war and how that act of rebellion made him feel good. As they talk, the camera comes closer to Descombes, until finally the grill seems to vanish. Father and son see and hear each other without constraint. They have reached the kind of understanding that goes beyond convention.

Descombes's struggle to break away from the conventional constraints on individual behavior has a parallel in Tavernier's violation of the conventions of the police/detective genre. The underlying story conforms to generic expectations: a crime is committed, the criminal is pursued by the police, he is captured, tried, convicted, and sent to prison. What is unconventional is that we are not permitted to see the crime, the pursuit, the arrest, or the conviction. The only seemingly conventional scene shows us Bernard in jail at the end, but by this time Tavernier has so shattered the conventional meanings of the genre that this scene, which "should" signify the triumph of the moral order over an evil criminal, affirms instead the transcendent value of the criminal. Tavernier evokes the police/detective genre in order to question its most basic premise—that crime is a social evil which requires unequivocal retribution. In this film, and also in *Let Joy Reign Supreme,* crime is seen as a form of social relationship which can, when studied carefully, yield new insights about the complex nature of social structures, and about the relationship of the individual to society.

In *Let Joy Reign Supreme,* Tavernier tackles an historical subject, Philippe d'Orléans, the Regent of France from the death of Louis XIV in 1715 until his own death eight years later. In the film, while Philippe, a cultivated and witty man, takes part in a seemingly endless round of orgiastic suppers at court, the poor are brutally impressed into colonial service in Louisiana. Against this backdrop, Tavernier focuses on three central characters whose lives and ambitions cross: the Marquis de Pontcallec (Jean-Pierre Marielle) leads a group of ragged Breton nobles in a pathetically inept *coup d'état* against the Regent; the Abbé Dubois (Jean Rochefort), chief counselor and procurer for Philippe, cunningly manipulates affairs of state in order to secure for himself his one ambition, a cardinal's cap; Philippe (Philippe Noiret), a man whose great gifts seem to be wasted and depleted, plans to bring his young god-daughter Sévérine from a Breton convent to become his mistress.

Descombes's discovery in *The Clockmaker*—that human truth lies beyond convention—seems to have profoundly affected Tavernier's conception of this second film. If *The Clockmaker* deals explicitly with the political and social constraints of convention on the subject of the film, *Let Joy Reign Supreme* goes further, implicitly raising questions about the epistemological constraints of convention that affect our ability to know the subject of the film. The dilemma for the historian, the film-maker, and the audience is this: if we see Philippe through the perspective of any one of the various conventional genres of historical discourse (for example, historical romance, memoir, chronicle, etc.) we will not, in fact, see him at all.

In order to follow the deepening of Tavernier's concern with generic convention, we will devote less attention to questions of texture and technique in this film, and concentrate instead on explaining its complex conception. It is helpful, first, to review the film's genesis. Tavernier and co-scenarist Jean Aurenche began with the idea of transposing for the screen the Alexander Dumas novel, *The Regent's Daughter.* In this archly

romantic work, a fictional love story is set against the historically authentic, ill-fated plot of a group of Breton nobles to overthrow Philippe. Aurenche explains in an interview that they abandoned this original project because their audience would lack the familiarity with the events and personages of the novel that Dumas could expect from his readers. Leaving the novel behind, for a time at least, they turned to history. The sources Aurenche mentions—Saint-Simon, Michelet, and Farge—are interesting because each one typifies a different genre of historical writing.

Saint-Simon's memoirs are rich in detail and anecdote. Since we know he was both firsthand observer and participant in the events he records, we tend to believe him in the same way that we "believe" the details in a documentary film. But the memoir is no less an artful construct than the documentary—both manipulate our faith in the verisimilitude of eyewitness accounts in order to achieve partisan ends. Because the memoir is an egocentric text, our interest is ultimately drawn to the author, as we are meant to sympathize with him, or at least to understand him. And it is to a great extent the sheer volume of detail that convinces us that he must be right.

The nineteenth-century historian, Michelet, on the other hand, presents a more traditional account; he perceives the past as part of a teleological narrative. In his preface to the volume of his *History of France* devoted to the Regency and Louis XV, he explains the controlling vision of his work: the barbarous past is the enemy which yields to a bright future of progress. Although 1789 is the beginning of this happy new era for Michelet, he calls the Regency the "first act" of the Revolution, and suggests that this epoch can best be understood by studying its "great actors." The theatrical metaphor reveals his belief that history is a kind of grand drama whose shape is determined by the actions and conflicts of grand personages.

The title of Arlette Farge's recent work, *The Theft of Food in Paris in the Eighteenth Century,* signals immediately the kind of historical inquiry that has become more fashionable today. Rejecting the subject matter of traditional history—wars and revolutions, princes and statesmen—Farge announces in her preface that the essential task of the historian is to discover the "everyday-ness" of the past. This reconstruction of the everyday begins not with the subjective accounts of eyewitnesses, but with the most objective facts of public record: demographic figures and other statistical records. It is the historian's task to discover not the chronology, but the structure of events which makes these numbers intelligible.

Phillippe Noiret and Marina Vlady: LET JOY REIGN SUPREME

What Tavernier has recognized is that Dumas, Saint-Simon, Michelet, and Farge represent four different modes of seeing the past, each of them interesting and valid but all of them limited and incomplete. His achievement is the masterful way in which he has taken the useful elements of each of the genres and joined them together into a new whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. This new synthesis is more than just an amalgam, however, for each of the elements, now in a new context, creates fresh reverberations in the other components. Moreover, the clash of the four genres shocks us into a new awareness of the ways in which generic conventions limit and distort our view of the past.

Of the four, the historical romance, essentially a fictional mode, takes the greatest liberty with "fact" in order to create adventure, excitement, and suspense. More than the three modes of historical writing, it focuses our interest on character, but generic conventions demand that character be presented in a severely limited, highly romantic way. In the Dumas novel, Philippe, whose reputation for debauchery leads us to believe that he may be plotting the defloration of his own daughter Hélène, is finally redeemed by her purity and by the nobility of Gaston, the Breton rebel who is her lover. The Abbé Dubois, an apothecary's son who through incredible cunning became a cardinal and Philippe's prime minister,

is depicted by Dumas as a mustache-twirling villain.

In the film, Tavernier borrows the novel's suspense and intrigue—the Breton conspiracy against Philippe and Dubois's machinations to crush it. However, the romantic center of the novel, the noble love of Hélène and Gaston, is displaced in the film. There is no Gaston, no dashing young hero. The leader of the rebels is instead a middle-aged, disheveled, and penniless marquis named Pontcallec, who derives as much from literary and legendary sources as from reliable historical records. Too unimportant to earn a place in Saint-Simon or Michelet, Pontcallec's memory is preserved in a Breton folk song which Tavernier uses on the sound track, marking Pontcallec's transformation from fact to legend, from lovable buffoon to folk hero.[3] Much of the film's humor comes from Pontcallec's obvious straining to behave according to chivalric conventions, from the disparity between his dashing self-conception and his clumsy reality. Pontcallec is a comically self-conscious Quixote, aware of his own posing and how inadequate a job he does at it, yet despite this awareness, as earnest about himself as he can be. It is appropriate that Pontcallec evokes for us the anachronistic and nostalgic world of romance, because the rebellion he leads—the refusal of the nobles to submit to taxation—represents one of the last gasps of the feudal spirit in the modern world. It is Pontcallec's sense of his honor as a noble that compels his action, not self-interest or ambition. And if the awkwardness of Pontcallec's chivalric posturing makes us laugh, the contrast between his romance ideals and the *Realpolitik* values of the court makes us admire him.

Beyond the developments of characters and the larger narrative movements in the film there is a wealth of detail that conveys the feeling and texture of the period. For many of these particulars Tavernier has drawn on Saint-Simon, but he has done so without accepting the obvious bias of the memoirs. Because Saint-Simon hated Dubois (to the point that he kept a portrait of the Abbé over his toilet), he really doesn't do him justice in the memoirs and turns a fascinating character into a cardboard villain. Tavernier rejects such judgments, but he does draw on the telling details provided by Saint-Simon—for example, Dubois's habit of jumping around a room on top of the furniture when he was excited.

Much of the intrigue at court derives from Dubois's ruling ambition to become a cardinal. Here we enter Michelet's realm, the explanation of historical events through the personalities of the actors responsible for them. Matters of state—the French alliance with England, the execution of the Breton conspirators—are seen to depend upon Dubois's ambition and upon his ability to defeat Philippe's liberal and humane principles by playing on his indolence and weakness. But Tavernier seems to understand that this kind of explanation is continually in danger of violating the rich complexity of personality. Unlike Descombes, who was angry at having been turned into "The Murderer's Father," Philippe is resigned to his fate and can muse wryly about how history will remember him: perhaps because his sensual desires have outlived his days of vigorous performance, he will be known as "Philippe the Fondler."

If the history of Great Actors tends to oversimplify in order to explain, it also, according to current historians, tends to overvalue the importance and the autonomy of individual personalities. One of Tavernier's finest accomplishments in *Let Joy Reign Supreme* is that he has managed to embody in character and in the defining relationships among characters what a historian like Farge would see as the structure of the age. The Great Actors, then, are no longer seen as the makers of rules; instead they are merely pieces in a large game, and it becomes important to understand the system of rules—the unconscious pattern—which governs their behavior. For Tavernier, the Regency is best understood as a new system of

LET JOY REIGN SUPREME

rules that is neither cultural nor political, but essentially economic. During the Regency there was a revolution in finance, named Law's System after the Scots economist who was its mastermind. Although its intricacies are not clearly explained in *Let Joy Reign Supreme,* Tavernier places great emphasis on the broad features of Law's System because he sees it as a kind of paradigm for the Regency. While the state bank controls the money supply, issuing paper money at such a rate as to cause galloping inflation, there is wild speculation in stock issued to finance the colonial exploitation of Louisiana. Thus the Regency is seen as a kind of antithesis to the older, feudal order which assigned everyone a fixed place within a stable system of value—people speculate in stock only when they are reasonably sure that values will change. Under Law's System fortunes are made overnight, and the country is gripped by a frenzy of greed that blinds everyone to all values except one—money. If Pontcallec reminds us of a more stable world where men behaved according to principles of honor, the court reveals a world where all relationships have become monetary transactions. Dubois defends his alliance of Catholic France to Protestant England on the grounds that, at the time, money is Protestant and he needs money. Not only is prostitution the most lucrative business in Paris, but Philippe even pays young men to service his whores when he himself can no longer manage it. When the Regent's coach accidentally hits and kills a peasant boy, Philippe, shaken, reaches immediately for his purse. That the boy's sister scorns his money is a sign that the Revolution is near.

Tavernier sees prostitution, both literal and figurative, as one definitive model for relationships in this new economic order, theft as another. A man has been hung for pilfering, and before his corpse is cut down we see someone else steal his boots. Not only the servants at court but even the royal physician and the noble Comte de Horn are shown stealing whatever they can get their hands on. In a world ruled solely by economic value, persons are no more sacred than property—people are kidnapped (in a sense, stolen) by the Regent's men and shipped off to work in America. Tavernier follows the chain of theft all the way to its victims at the bottom—the Louisiana conscripts and the starving peasants of Brittany.

It is in terms of this structure of the age that Tavernier situates the elusive mystery of Philippe's character. Historians from Michelet to Guerard have found Philippe to be an equivocal figure, an *homme d'esprit,* cultivated, generous, humane, witty, yet slothful, self-indulgent, weak, capable of yielding principle to expediency. Tavernier finds him no less equivocal, but sees in Philippe a reflection of the age. Like the nation, Philippe is bankrupt; what he has to offer in his transactions with other people—love, wit, tenderness—is so much worthless currency because it is no longer based on any stable system of value. And in this speculative world, the old sources of value have run dry. The film's epigraph, taken from Jacques Audiberti (which, unfortunately, was not translated in the subtitles of the print we saw), suggests as much: "But all this love I'll give, where will I get it from?"

In a recent interview Tavernier says that one of his favorite phrases is Michelet's "To deal with history, you have to unlearn respect." The same, he adds, is true of contemporary history. If *The Clockmaker* and *Let Joy Reign Supreme* are any indication, unlearning respect means first and foremost a thorough questioning of the conventional ways of behaving and understanding that have been embodied not only in our social and political institutions but also in the narrative forms which shape the work of film-makers. The creative tension arises from Tavernier's success in violating, inverting, or ignoring conventions, in pushing beyond the limits of generic constraints.

NOTES

1. In his third and fourth films, slated for release soon in the United States, Tavernier's continued interest in genre is apparent: *The Judge and the Assassin* (1975) is another exploration in history, a reconstructed *fait divers* that takes the form of a courtroom drama; *Spoiled Children* (1977), an *hommage* to Renoir's *The Crime of M. Lange*, in part works against the conventions of the adulterous love story.
2. It is significant that there is no model for Guiboud in the Simenon novel which is the basis for the film; this character is substantially Tavernier's own creation.
3. Much of the material on Pontcallec and the Breton conspiracy comes from Pierre de la Condamine's curious history, *Pontcallec: A Strange Conspiracy in the Heart of Brittany.*

STEFAN FLEISCHER

Dying to be on Television

About two years ago Michael Roemer made a film called *Dying* which was shown on the Public Broadcasting Service network. The film, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, also received a critical response, with reviewers falling down in pious acclaim at the honesty and realism of Roemer's effort. I want to suggest that this film achieved its considerable success, not because it is a good film (if anybody cares, I think it is a mostly bad film which raises perplexing and difficult questions), but because it speaks so clearly in the accents of the official culture.

Roemer's film is in that dialect of the culture which I denominate as "liberal/sensitive," the prevalent dialect of the PBS network, the NEH itself, as well as of *The Atlantic* and the Arts and Leisure pages of the Sunday *New York Times*. Roemer's interest in *Dying* is to show that death is bearable, that compassion and caring carry people through, that religion helps. As someone who has watched the film and has also been witnessing the slow dying of a person I am close to, I think I see more sharply than a viewer not so immediately absorbed just what rings false in *Dying*, in what ways Roemer is trying very hard not to tell the truth in his film, and how certain truths emerge almost in despite of Roemer's efforts. The main problem and limitation of the film *Dying* is, oddly, its sense of tact and good taste in dealing with a taboo subject. Perhaps these defects are, in a sense, obligatory: Roemer knew he had an important subject, he knew he wanted it on national television. He therefore produced a film which "fit" the demands of the marketplace. In so doing he made a beautiful film on an ugly subject, whereas it could be that what is needed is an ugly film.

I must make some assumptions explicit here: (1) all films, including *cinéma vérité* (and home-movies for that matter), are artful, more or less; (2) the most interesting art-work is the one which engages most completely the (largely unspoken) ideology of a culture; and (3) ideology influences the art-work much more than any art-work influences ideology. Roemer's film proposes to show something of the process of dying; because they are in a film, certain episodes of dying are seen as dramatic events; because it is a film *Dying* is more dramatistic than an essay or an elegiac poem. Roemer is clearly correct in seeing dying as a process, as something going on (and on and on) in time. Whatever there is of drama in *Dying* comes from Roemer's attention to process. But he is clearly wrong in showing dying as an orderly and somehow "natural" process, where there are great stretches of peace and quiet.

The narrative core of the film consists of three case histories featuring people who assented to being in the film, who wanted the stories of their dying to be told on television. Not a surprising impulse: "Tell them my story, Horatio," says Hamlet at the end of the play. All three case histories end identically: the screen goes black over the last image, the name and date of death hold on the screen. But before we get to this straightforward narrative movement, the film opens with two highly rhetorical episodes (it also concludes with a ceremonial coda) which function to distance and rationalize the dramatic spectacle of the case histories. The film opens with an interview of a young mother, the widow of a recent cancer victim. Then in an oddly placed, belated introduction we get a complicated on-camera explanation of motives and intentions (how this film came to be made, etc.) by the Yale Shakespeare scholar, Maynard Mack. The episodic order of the film therefore is this: widow's recollection—Mack's introduction—Sally's history—history of a couple, Harriett and Bill—finally, the Rev. Bryant history, with his funeral as a ceremonial, ritual coda.

Partly because reviewers paid so much attention to it (much of it in the "don't miss this 'serious television'" mode of hype) and partly because "thanatology" is a fashionable subject these days, *Dying* achieved the status, however fleeting, of an important television event. As such things typically happen, its fate would then normally be to dis-

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appear—one more comestible, chewed up and consumed by TV. But not quite so—revived in 1977 as a teaching film and accompanied by a glossy brochure with dumb questions "designed" to help start discussions, *Dying* is offered for use in the countless thanatology courses recently developed at universities and medical institutions throughout the country.

The film survives and is being absorbed into the fabric of official culture because it so clearly elaborates a particular set of myths about dying. The major tenet holds that dying is a problem to be "dealt with" and the task of those who surround the dying is to afford that person a death with "Dignity." The task can be accomplished, so the thinking goes, by adopting a crisis-management psychology and a hushed, pious demeanor. Roemer's film sees dying, first and last, as a psychological drama: his narrative consists of four stories of how different people react to what is perceived as the greatest of all crises.

This way of perceiving death is entirely consistent with the way dying is considered in that most influential book by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*. Dr. Ross's work is altogether humane, in some ways daring and groundbreaking; nevertheless it offers a narrowly incomplete account of the phenomenon of dying because of its almost exclusive attention to the psychological dimension of dying, accompanied by a naive faith in the ability of psychological insight to rationalize experience. It is a belief that the dying body will somehow listen to reason. But dying is not first of all a mental problem. The most brutal and the most inescapable fact about dying (particularly obvious with a slow death from a wasting disease like cancer), consequently the fact most systematically repressed, is the nature of the physical process itself—pain, incapacity, and the withering away of flesh. The scientizing, rationalistic view, shared by Kübler-Ross and Roemer, and quite of a piece with prevailing humanistic ideology, makes the body over into a window, not for the soul, but for ventilating feelings. This allows us to dress dying in a panoply of signs—emotional and psychological and, finally, spiritual.

To read these signs all too often means that we do not read the body. Roemer's film, for example, seeks only to reveal the psychological circumstances of his characters, presenting mood and atmosphere, relegating the inexorable physical destruction of these people to the background. Roemer very frequently employs a long take to film the cancer patient in a quiet setting, riding in a car for example. In one rather spectacular instance, Sally sits in a chair gazing past a poinsettia on the sill and out the window while she listens to Beethoven on the radio. We see the coming of death as a quiet twilight movement—heroic music, dramatic falling light—a sad but entirely calm waiting for the end. The probing pokes, the needles drawing blood, biopsies, surgery, the taking of histories ("Any trouble moving your bowels? Did your father ever have diabetes? Any bleeding from your rectum? Your mouth?"), the climbing onto enameled metal tables for scans and radiation, the vomiting from chemotherapy—almost all that is the standard routine and attendant consequence of contemporary medical therapy is *visually* ignored in the film, seemingly banished to the realm of the obscene, literally off stage. Roemer's audience is spared the strain of watching these indignities, but at the same time is denied a certain morbid interest. In contrast one might think of Brakhage's autopsy film, devoted exclusively to morbid interest; Roemer's film spiritualizes and quite misleadingly psychologizes the condition of dying.

It is safe to assume that any film made under the patronage of the NEH and then uniformly celebrated by journalists will quite directly reflect the ideology of its patrons and will have the aim of comforting rather than agitating its audience. It is of specific ideological interest to the National Endowment to forward mythologies about the dignity of man, defining that dignity always as "indomitable spirit" and, in so doing, to sponsor projects which may be overtly secular in content (though *Dying* as it happens is not), but which nevertheless are suffused with a pronounced religiosity of tone. In a famous aphorism Marx observed that religion is the opium of the people. The context of the observation qualifies the remark in an odd and subtle way. In the same paragraph Marx also notes that religion is "the only heart in a heartless world." This suggests that religion can be seen as a positive force, a propaedeutic to eventual social change, because it offers the hope that things must not always be as cruel as they are now. But religion is also per-

ceived historically by Marx as repressive and counter-revolutionary, a false consciousness offering a hope which is literally immaterial and therefore delusive. It is the narcotic of last resort, which deadens even as it comforts those otherwise comfortless.

Roemer's film is religious exactly in Marx's double-edged use of the term: *Dying* urges us to take heart because we are seeing episodes in the dignity of man. The overall tendency of the film is to describe dying as an individual, spiritual adventure, perhaps the only adventure everyone can have in these unheroic times. By attaching a spiritual coherence to the process of dying the film suppresses the more painful truths about the subject: dying is a physical process where something profound and dreadful just happens; before death is rationalized it is always *felt* as chaos and defeat; and, like everything else, dying occurs in a world which is a context of social, economic, and material contingencies, where everything (systems, bureaucracies, institutions) continuously and mostly unfeelingly intrude upon the dying person, upon his pain and his feelings. If Roemer's film were to focus in some sharp way on just some of the material facts of dying (on how Medicare doesn't work or on how physicians routinely overprescribe the wrong mood-altering medications, not because they are insensitive bad guys—some are and some are not—but because they are too busy), if any of this were to be revealed in an immediate and particular, dramatic way, the resulting film would be sufficiently hard to take that it would probably not find a comfortable home on national television.

In *Dying* the Harriett and Bill episode, which is least directly about a dying individual and most directly about one kind of socio-political-economic structure (the bourgeois family), also is the most informative, morally complex, and emotionally disturbing episode to watch and absorb. If Roemer had chosen to devote an entire film to the violent tearing of the human fabric and the horrifying moral impasses presented in the Harriett and Bill episode (she wants him to die soon, so she might have a chance to remarry "before the boys are teenagers without a father"), and if by some fluke Roemer did secure a spot on television for such a film, one can imagine the reviews all too easily: "morbid," "pessimistic," "nihilistic."

DYING: *From the Harriett and Bill episode.*

Instead Roemer hides the Harriett and Bill episode in the middle of the film, framing it with up-beat episodes of the indomitable-spirit-of-man type. It is more than a little awkward for me to have to say this because Roemer is so obviously a good man who has had more than his share of trouble from the system. He co-directed *Nothing But a Man,* which owed much to a DeSica sort of neorealism, but which early on (1964) represented black life in something like a serious way, giving it the distinction of being one of a tiny number of realistic American films about blacks and, it need hardly be said, dooming it to obscurity. One film of Roemer's, a documentary on a slum in Sicily, was contracted for by NBC, which never broadcast it (too strong, too controversial—or some such claptrap reason), while also preventing Roemer from distributing it because after all—Catch 22—he only made the thing, the network owns it. With *Dying* Roemer covers his flanks much more astutely. Sponsored by the NEH, he makes sure that his film looks super-humanistic; he insures that no one will mistake the central proposition of the film: dying may potentially be a supreme moment of individual human dignity. One can be sure that the NEH was delighted that one of its projects so resonantly affirmed the abiding verities.

Consider the look of the film. Much of its impact stems from its being a documentary in color (or rather mostly in color with some footage of the Harriett and Bill episode in black and white). Whenever he can, Roemer chooses shots which fill the frame with large, simple or splashy

shapes in monotone. He springs for hot, saturated reds (Sally's poinsettia smack in the center of the frame) and silky lime-sherbet greens, colors that hold up extremely well in the cooled-down, fuzzed-up translation to television. The main point of Roemer's cinematography is to end up with a smooth and good-looking TV image. As a consequence, if you see the film directly in its 16mm version the effects are often gaudy. In the opening sequence, for example, while a women's chorus sings "Jerusalem," the first take develops out of a shot of a choir director robed in brilliant red, zooming back and panning across the row of singing women until it settles and holds in medium-shot, 3/4 profile on a young woman singing fervently; cut to the first episode (the widow's narrative) with this young woman gazing straight into a camera that holds a dramatically lit close-up. Even though the interview with the widow is shot out of doors (on a porch perhaps) Roemer uses reflectors and fill lights to boost the image, to gloss it up. He locks into a static *mise-en-scène*, a talking head shot, brightly and dramatically lit, because this kind of thing looks particularly good on television.

This first episode, despite the doctored qualities of the image, is nevertheless extremely compelling, in precisely those ways we think of as being characteristic of *cinéma vérité*. This earnest-looking, articulate, young WASP woman has a ghastly story to tell—that of her graduate student husband's recent death from lymphosarcoma. She tells, in effect, how both she and he were terribly brave and good and loving and how they both suffered past bearing. She tells all this fluently, expressively, looking straight at the camera. Very few people can stand up full face to the scrutiny of the camera in this kind of close-up. Bergman explores both the aesthetics and the dramatic power of this kind of long-take shot in *Persona*, for example, but with the formidable professional services of Bibi Anderssen and Liv Ullmann as well as the aid of a script. The widow in the Roemer interview has only her own experience to rely on and she never flinches; she is ice-hard in her grief. This introductory episode reveals some important things about dying, but what it most of all establishes is that the husband's death exists now as an extremely well told story, full of detail and passion. We are shown how in this young woman's *memory* her husband's dying was a process of suffering and dignity both. Whether it was actually so matters I think not in the least. When she tells of her husband's last hours, last gestures, and his last words—he and she spend the day chatting, then quite suddenly he gets tired, he asks the doctors to cut his lifelines, he kisses her and says, "Let's call it quits, Pooh"—we are gripped (there is no other word) by this excruciating narrative of saying good-bye. We are hearing another version of the archetypal story of departure. It is the widow's story, her myth, her *art* which is compelling. Roemer's art of manipulating the image, including gauzy Clairol commercial inserts of the widow and her two young daughters picnicking on the grass, holding hands and giving silent grace with bowed heads, is nugatory at least in this instance.

Just after the widow's story the film abruptly loses its nerve. Enter Professor Mack. Just as actors on commercial television still pretend to be doctors and recommend laxatives or aspirin, on PBS learned professors pretend to mediate the great issues of culture vs. anarchy and, often most persuasively, recommend economics, the ascent of man, civilization, or, most recently, the key to the universe. In Roemer's film Maynard Mack appears belatedly, comfortable in shirtsleeves (though buttoned-down), gentle-looking in his study, his arm draped casually over his chair. His introduction is slipped in as unobtrusively as possible, but the question arises nevertheless:

What is Maynard Mack doing in this film? He is there to be reassuring while he tells us what to think.

Mack makes a nice speech about how Roemer really thought he might want to make a film about the history of attitudes toward death and dying from Homer to the present, about how, acting as a "consultant" (my own unkind guess about this is that Mack stepped in to oversee how the grant money from the NEH was being spent) and seeing some of the case-history footage, Mack realized with Roemer that the entire conception of the film would have to change and that these people in the film should be left to reveal their own stories. As predictably as the sun setting in the evening, Mack clinches his point by "reminding" himself of that moment in *King Lear* when the King contrasts his furred robes with the beggar's nakedness, quoting, "Thou art the thing itself; unaccommodated man is nothing more but such a poor, bare forked animal . . ." Mack uses the quote to underline the central mystification of *Dying*, namely, that the film is about something more real than mere art; that what we as audience are going to get is a glimpse of "the thing itself." Of course, we never get "the thing itself" in a work of art; in the great tragedies, we get crushingly direct indicative gestures (the reiterated commands to "Look there, look there" in *King Lear*, for example); at worst, we get works which allegorize narrow spiritual meanings over experiences because the artist is afraid of the subversive, uncontrollable implications of what he or she is touching upon. Dying is notable as an example of one such experience which, before it is rationalized, is felt as an uncontrollable fall. All the rhetoric of Roemer's film, including the imposition of gentlemanly-scholarly explanations, tries to break this fall, attempts to wrest control over a threatening subject matter, and the Mack introduction epitomizes the film's establishment of a *cordon sanitaire* around what is messy and fearsome. Mack, mystifying his audience with lines from *King Lear*, is just as much a bullying distraction from what we might perceive as really there, as was Westbrook Van Voorhis, the voice of God in the old *March of Time* newsreels. Mack's commentary is so important because it establishes a tone of sympathetic, judicious sobriety; a tone which envelops, a little like a fog, both the desperate craziness of a middle-class housewife (Harriett) and the religious dignity of the black preacher (Rev. Bryant) facing up to his own death. With the help of the commentary, we can be understanding of these figures as long as we feel that we have some distance on them, that they are not us.

Certain details in the Harriett and Bill episode are just plain bizarre, imposing a soap-opera formalism on Roemer's most ambiguously, raggedly realistic episode. In one of the six or seven car scenes in the film we hear very quietly but quite unmistakably on the sound track a stringy arrangement of Streisand's "The Way We Were." The song tells us—sharp irony—that things with Harriett and Bill are indeed not the way they once were. But we hardly need mood music to tell us that. We know already that Bill is dying from a particularly vicious form of cancer. The logic of the shot implies that the song is coming over the car radio, which makes for a "natural" if heavy-handed irony; but then the same sound track overlaps into the next sequence, also involving a car ride, but this time to a hospital.

The documentary camera rarely shows us something we don't already know and is in this way a mnemonic much more than a device which communicates "news" in the numerous problematic senses of that word. The documentary camera succeeds best when it catches the most common gestures and shows them forth. In other words, when it is working well, the documentary camera observes ordinary material and by a kind of distillation discovers character and drama and process. The crucial conceptual and esthetic flaw in *Dying* is in Roemer's decision to add expressive flourishes and to top gestures, significant in themselves, by elaborate lighting set-ups, fancy ironies on the sound track, or pointedly symbolic cutaways. The film is full of glossy elegiac, pastoral imagery; a single red rose in tight close-up and perhaps a dozen other shots of a carefully composed "nature" framing the human action. For every gesture Roemer catches well and powerfully there are five which come off as wrong because they are not really seen for their own sake, not noticed as part of the movement of things, but seen as part of a set-up, seen for the purpose of constructing a significance in front of the camera.

Nowhere is the awkwardness of not seeing things

for their own sake more apparent than in the Rev. Bryant episode—the story of the preacher who is dying relatively quickly because his cancer has spread to his liver. Many reviewers were quick to spring for this episode as expressing an extraordinary nobility and heroism. The reaction was pure knee-jerk response, stereotypical seeing of the black man as hero only because he is black. Not that Rev. Bryant does not do heroic things in the episode. He has a moment of wonderful, mordant gallows humor at his own expense, telling his wife that he's going to ignore the doctor's prognosis of imminent death because, "It ain't goin' to hurt the doctor for me to feel like that." The trouble lies in the way Roemer attempts to make the Rev. Bryant into a Great Personage.

The sequence in which the Rev. Bryant delivers his final sermon to his church is a glaring embarrassment; it is overly long, overly elaborately staged and, what is worst, it looks like it was shot in a makeshift studio. Because Roemer is looking only for universals he manages to make particular and real space look wrong and fake. The main prop is a lurid electric cross in the upper part of the shot, behind the Rev. Bryant as he perches dramatically over his lectern. The camera sits on this image, holding and holding at fairly extreme up-angle. When the camera does pull away we see that the entire podium area is lit by two banks of studio lights and as the camera pans over to the gospel chorus we notice that, aside from some members of his family, the Rev. Bryant has almost no one in his congregation. The sermon is, I think, a re-creation, filmed for the sake of spectacle (the glowing cross, the stage area bathed in high-key light, the gospel chorus jumping around with their bright robes all shimmery satin), but it is a spectacle styled to look like a documentary for us out here in TV-land. During his sermon the Rev. Bryant, exhausted and debilitated, works terribly hard to tell his own story and to explain the meaning of his tribulation in the style which has been his own all his life: the full periods and rising paratactic rhetoric of black preaching. Roemer works terribly hard to make the Rev. Bryant look good instead of letting him look real. Black preachers do indeed often preach beneath a neon cross and gospel choruses tend toward brightly colored robes. But Roemer's aggressive arranging takes this material and tries to make it over to a synthetic image, a souped-up stereotype of the glorious black preacher. Roemer approaches the Rev. Bryant by his lectern with precisely the same reverent tactlessness as Margaret Bourke-White displayed in the thirties in her notorious photograph of a black preacher, in which she got down on her knees to shoot for garish effect, exploiting up-angle composition and the blast of the flash bulb.*

It will surely be objected that I have chosen to find fault over mostly trivial details, that all documentarians fake it one way or another, that the content of a film exists (to a certain extent at least) independently of its style of presentation. Perhaps *Dying* deserves a more sympathetic reading than the one here proposed. Perhaps, as the daily reviewers seem to have done, one really ought to see past or around the fruitcake, vibrato fiddling, because Roemer, after all, has found particular stories of real people, who really died, and put these on film so they could be seen on television; that must count for something. I remain mostly perplexed about this film which earnestly peddles easily acceptable pieties as if these were "the thing itself." I am saddened by all the casual fakery the film indulges in for the sake of being in good taste. I shudder to think of the quality of discussion this film must provoke in all those "thanatology" courses.

*See William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (New York, 1973) for a fine discussion of the Bourke-White photo and its governing aesthetic; especially pp. 219–23.

The great limitation and finally the great dishonesty of all these newer humanistic approaches, courses and films and books that would teach about dying, is in the assumption that one can combine a realism of perception or understanding with a thematics of consolation. The result is always evasion and platitude. Whatever realism exists about dying seems to belong to a special group of women novelists—Harriette Arnow, Margaret Lawrence, Margaret Drablle, and perhaps most powerfully to Tillie Olsen. This is a realism born of soured and curdled idealism, which always recognizes the physical indignity of dying, which answers the question, "How do you bear it?" the way one of Margaret Drabble's characters does: "I don't bear it." This is a realism which sees dying as disorderly and painful and expensive, which stresses—as Roemer is never quite able to do—in the words from Tillie Olsen's *Tell Me A Riddle:* "Such hard work it is to die." We all need teaching in how to do such hard work.

FALLOUT Some Notes on the Films of Bruce Conner

WILLIAM MORITZ AND BEVERLY O'NEILL

Although we're accustomed to nuclear power's presence in our daily lives, we have had to awaken to the realization that yesterday's dream of "Atoms for Peace" is today's nightmare. This last decade has seen nuclear opposition grow world-wide: from the organized protest of the Japanese *hibakusha* (atomic bomb survivors) to the actions of farmer Sam Lovejoy in Massachusetts, who singlehandedly tore down a $75,000 structure that marked the early building of two nuclear reactors.

It is becoming clear, with many alarming details already at hand, that nuclear energy is an unsafe technology. No safe system for disposing of dangerous radioactive wastes is in existence, and they are already being produced in enormous quantities. Even low-level radiation from nuclear power stations has now been implicated in increased levels of leukemia. Most spectacularly of all, both controlled and uncontrolled proliferation of weapons is underway: the number of countries that "have the bomb" grows steadily; alarming quantities of plutonium and enriched uranium have mysteriously "disappeared"; and the construction of workable if unsophisticated bombs is the subject of undergraduate term papers. Weapons testing in Nevada and a nuclear accident in the Soviet Union have left huge areas of land uninhabitable.

Given the concern for our present and future ecological welfare, it is timely and brilliant of Bruce Conner to have selected the birth of the Atomic Age as the subject of his newest film, *Crossroads.* From material recently declassified by the Defense Department, Conner has constructed a 36-minute work, editing together 27 different takes of the early atomic explosions at Bikini, all un-altered found footage in its original black and white. The film is without dialogue or descriptive factual detail. It consists simply of the visual record of these first bombs' destructive capability.

In his researching, Conner uncovered a vivid historical account of the Bikini tests written for the Joint Task Force (Army and Navy) by W. A. Shurcliff. Interestingly, what one would expect to be a dry, methodical description is in fact dramatic and fascinating, revealing how impossible it was to suppress the bomb's overwhelming power. This original state of consciousness is what Conner wants us to re-experience in his film. What were the circumstances surrounding these tests, as described by Shurcliff?

Just a few months after bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki, our Army and Navy conducted Operation Crossroads, to study the actual scope and after-effects of a nuclear detonation. Two tests were made several weeks apart. During the first, in which an A-bomb was exploded in air, only a small number of test ships were sunk, and the

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The great limitation and finally the great dishonesty of all these newer humanistic approaches, courses and films and books that would teach about dying, is in the assumption that one can combine a realism of perception or understanding with a thematics of consolation. The result is always evasion and platitude. Whatever realism exists about dying seems to belong to a special group of women novelists—Harriette Arnow, Margaret Lawrence, Margaret Drablle, and perhaps most powerfully to Tillie Olsen. This is a realism born of soured and curdled idealism, which always recognizes the physical indignity of dying, which answers the question, "How do you bear it?" the way one of Margaret Drabble's characters does: "I don't bear it." This is a realism which sees dying as disorderly and painful and expensive, which stresses—as Roemer is never quite able to do—in the words from Tillie Olsen's *Tell Me A Riddle:* "Such hard work it is to die." We all need teaching in how to do such hard work.

FALLOUT Some Notes on the Films of Bruce Conner

WILLIAM MORITZ AND BEVERLY O'NEILL

Although we're accustomed to nuclear power's presence in our daily lives, we have had to awaken to the realization that yesterday's dream of "Atoms for Peace" is today's nightmare. This last decade has seen nuclear opposition grow world-wide: from the organized protest of the Japanese *hibakusha* (atomic bomb survivors) to the actions of farmer Sam Lovejoy in Massachusetts, who singlehandedly tore down a $75,000 structure that marked the early building of two nuclear reactors.

It is becoming clear, with many alarming details already at hand, that nuclear energy is an unsafe technology. No safe system for disposing of dangerous radioactive wastes is in existence, and they are already being produced in enormous quantities. Even low-level radiation from nuclear power stations has now been implicated in increased levels of leukemia. Most spectacularly of all, both controlled and uncontrolled proliferation of weapons is underway: the number of countries that "have the bomb" grows steadily; alarming quantities of plutonium and enriched uranium have mysteriously "disappeared"; and the construction of workable if unsophisticated bombs is the subject of undergraduate term papers. Weapons testing in Nevada and a nuclear accident in the Soviet Union have left huge areas of land uninhabitable.

Given the concern for our present and future ecological welfare, it is timely and brilliant of Bruce Conner to have selected the birth of the Atomic Age as the subject of his newest film, *Crossroads.* From material recently declassified by the Defense Department, Conner has constructed a 36-minute work, editing together 27 different takes of the early atomic explosions at Bikini, all un-altered found footage in its original black and white. The film is without dialogue or descriptive factual detail. It consists simply of the visual record of these first bombs' destructive capability.

In his researching, Conner uncovered a vivid historical account of the Bikini tests written for the Joint Task Force (Army and Navy) by W. A. Shurcliff. Interestingly, what one would expect to be a dry, methodical description is in fact dramatic and fascinating, revealing how impossible it was to suppress the bomb's overwhelming power. This original state of consciousness is what Conner wants us to re-experience in his film. What were the circumstances surrounding these tests, as described by Shurcliff?

Just a few months after bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki, our Army and Navy conducted Operation Crossroads, to study the actual scope and after-effects of a nuclear detonation. Two tests were made several weeks apart. During the first, in which an A-bomb was exploded in air, only a small number of test ships were sunk, and the

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blast proved less impressive than had been expected from reports of the Japanese bombings. But the second test, whose footage Conner uses, was a spectacular underwater blast, broadcast to radio listeners around the world. It apparently produced the most severe shock wave felt on earth within recorded history. Two million tons of water were tossed up to an altitude of one and a half miles, creating a "cauliflower" cloud which would have dwarfed the island of Manhattan, according to a mock-up photo prepared by the Task Force and illustrated in Shurcliff's text.

This second test bomb had been suspended on a ship which was so "atomized" in the explosion that no significant particle was ever found. Nine of the largest and sturdiest carriers and submarines available (including the captured Japanese *Nagato*) sank, and 65 other battleships anchored at varying degrees of distance within a one-mile radius from the target point were damaged and contaminated by radioactivity. Conner includes many takes of these scenes, and their scale is nearly incomprehensible. 200 pigs (chosen because their skin and hair approximated that of humans) stationed on ships died instantly; many rats, goats, and guinea pigs, however, survived for almost two months after the blast while scientists checked them for radiation poisoning.

Extensive photographic documentation was at the heart of this operation. 500 cameras, trained on the event from drone planes and boats near the blast as well as in high-altitude aircraft and at more distant vantage points on sea and land, provided the Defense Department—and finally Conner and us—with an opportunity to appraise the nature of this new force.

As he opens the film, Conner first shows us the detonation from a distant vantage point, that cliché perspective on the event, with the blast forming the classic "mushroom" cloud. During this initial take, we spend a long period watching an almost still seascape with no intimation of what will occur. This quiet prelude heightens the violence and florid display of the unexpected explosion. The next shot, taken from a plane flying high over the dwarfed boats, also begins with a long, tranquil pre-bomb period, but now our knowledge of the previous shot makes us anxious, amplifying the shocking impact of the blast. The pace then quickens, with shorter shots, cut irregularly nearer to the time of the detonations, so that Conner virtually throws explosions at the audience. Some adjacent shots appear almost alike, as if looped; others seem radically different—such as an enormous column of water spurting side jets, each jet as large as the battleship this water-wall washes over.

So overexposed are we to the mushroom-cloud icon, that initially we assume we are seeing the same footage every time, even though each shot contains hundreds of fine, scientific distinctions imperceptible to the layman—as they once were to scientists as well. Shurcliff noted this as he documented conditions after the blast:

> Things happened so fast in the next five seconds that few eyewitnesses could afterwards recall the full scope and sequence of the phenomena. By studying slow-motion films . . . the scientists eventually pieced together the full story. Without question one reason why observers had so much trouble in retaining a clear impression of the explosion phenomena was the lack of appropriate words and concepts. The explosion phenomena abounded in absolutely unprecedented inventions in solid geometry. No adequate vocabulary existed for these novelties. The vocabularly bottleneck continued for months even among scientific groups. Finally after two months of verbal groping, a conference was held and over thirty special terms, with carefully drawn definitions, were agreed upon. Among these terms were the following: dome, fillet, side jets, bright tracks, cauliflower cloud, fallout, air shock disc, water shock disc, base surge, water mound, uprush, aftercloud.[1]

After a minute or two this imagery's time and space factors come into question. What is the source of the material? The ships appear so diminutive in comparison with the enormity of the blast; are we seeing a trick model shot from a Hollywood war movie? Are all these shots of the same blast? What kind of blast? (A-bomb? H-bomb?) Each seems different in length; are we seeing slow-motion shots? Are we seeing different camera-speed shots? Are we seeing any real-time (whatever that is) shots?

The "local color" of Patrick Gleeson's sound track is further provoking. Accompanying the first shot of the pre-blast period we hear birds twittering and a subdued voice in count-down. The subsequent roar of "airplane engines" and "explosions" is so close to traditional sound effects for fictional war movies that we never assume it

is electronic music; rather, in realistic terms, it adds to our confusion about the "facts" of the event or events we are watching. If the visual images are in slow-motion, are these sounds also slowed down? Some sounds synch directly with blasts; would there not be a delay comparable to the lightning-thunder displacement? Pondering this, we become sensitized to the shock waves that visibly shake the camera a moment after each detonation; but are these shock waves sounds?

Unexpectedly, the sound track pops to silence, and the rhythmic turmoil of the explosion scenes is replaced by a still image of two intersecting white lines that divide the screen into four equal rectangles. The suggestion of the cross-hairs in a gun or bomb sight is unavoidable in this context, but after a moment we realize that, ironically, this emblem also represents addition and crucifixion, and even the tree of life in arcane lore.

Conner now switches mode completely, exposing us to one of the most complex and problematic uses of the atomic icon. We hear a lush, repetitive meditation music specially composed and performed for the remainder of the film, by Terry Riley.[2] Initially the combination disturbs because we have been suddenly stripped of the familiar contexts (just exploited in the first section) in which we are habituated to dispose of this information. The serene music allows, in fact, forces us to contemplate the images with an almost unbearable concentration. We see close-up sections of portions of the blast in such detail that we can no longer doubt that the destruction of these "real" boats is a documentation of a "real" event. Released from the simulated "realism" of the Gleeson sound track "synch," some of the shock of the explosion dissipates. The viewer's situation changes from one of watching mimetic theater with social values dominant, to one of watching formalist painting with advanced aesthetic concerns. The film becomes a "piece," displaying an environmental series of transitions, much like Michael Snow's *Wavelength*. It slips away from the conventional film program, and now would be better suited to the purity of a white-walled gallery.

We become aware of the devices and techniques of the photography itself—wide-angle lenses, flicker of high-speed prism rotation, and infra-red film. We begin to observe lingering shots filled with little except lethargic, voluptuous cloud formations, which fade up to white, and eventually become so slow and ambiguous as to lose entirely the sensation of violence—to the point of fatigue. Ironically, we are suspended in calm displays of cloud and water, reminiscent of oriental landscape painting, Bernini's fountains and Baroque aureoles. Do we feel guilty for enjoying it? Do we feel bored because fiction seemed more spectacular?

The final shot is the longest in the whole film: in extreme slow-motion we watch as a huge tidal wave washes over and completely obscures a battleship, leaving the screen above the horizon line blank-white except for grain pattern; finally, after several minutes the ship reemerges, fading in slowly as the tidal wave apparently passes by. After the slow process of the boat's re-definition in sharp, dark tones, the image cuts to blackness which is held on-screen for several minutes while the music finishes.

The duration of this shot is crucial. The screen remains neutralized for so long we suffer excruciating resentment, ennui, and helpless rage. The reappearance of the ship provides a sense of psychic closure, a cathartic sense of relief that something man-made can survive. But Conner underscores the naivety of this easy hopefulness by maintaining the true "nothingness" of the black screen until it mitigates this climactic flood of emotion and re-establishes the meditation's balance.

The title *Crossroads* fades onto the screen. Evidently the Bikini project's use of the name "Crossroads" had no special metaphysical significance, since other similar ventures bore such titles as "Manhattan" and "Greenhouse"; however, after living with a chronic anxiety about nuclear mishap, we all share Conner's implied belief that this project constituted a turning point in human possibilities. A traditional folk belief holds that suicides' graves and gallows should be placed at crossroads.

Assessing the meaning of Conner's films requires a working knowledge of his background as a major West Coast assemblagist. His film work is firmly grounded in the visual arts and here he resembles Michael Snow, another multi-media genius—their best audience being one schooled in the complexities of modern object-making—from cubism to minimalism. Within this realm, though, Conner's identity is complicated by a

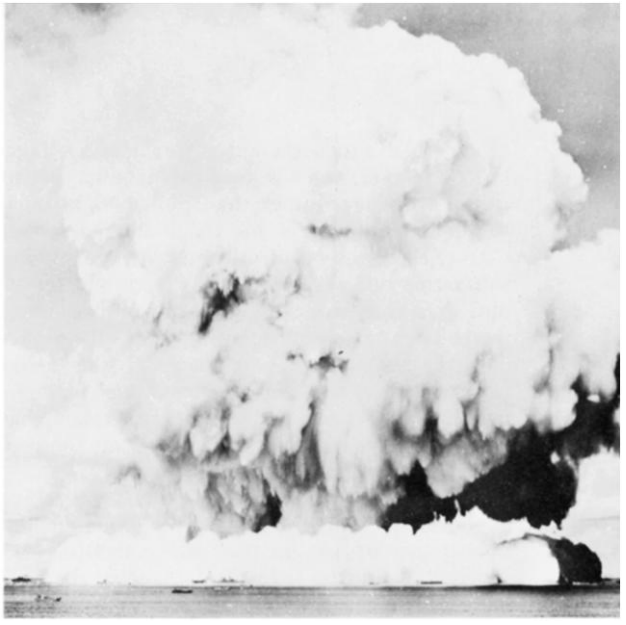
serious discomfort most modern artists have had with overt subject matter.

Formalism's dominance in painting and sculpture for the past several decades certainly relegated the handling of "hot content" to the status of an unfortunate irrelevancy or a bizarre regional backwater. The possibilities of critical misapprehension here has affected the intelligibility of artists whose work is as varied as Rauschenberg's or Conner's. Fortunately, this major new film, *Crossroads,* arrives at a time when the acceptance of subject matters including psychological narrativity (along with the politicizing of the art world at large: the positing of a feminist iconography, the growth of neo-Marxist criticism, etc.) has created a new arena engaging with formerly denied issues.

New American art has never been self-assured on a psychological terrain. We know that the "expressionism" tag for the New York School was an inexplicable appendage. (How are Rothko, Newman, Reinhardt expressionists?) We have consistently given prestige to a refined plasticity, consciously breeding out the emotional narrative.

For over twenty years, Conner's art has defined a trend in American expressionism. His early subjects often were saturated with intense emotion, and thus easy to dismiss as too blatant. Phil Leider characterized his sensibility in the early sixties: "He can visualize the loveliest flesh charred beyond recognition. The data which inform his work is that of the extermination camps, Hiroshima, horror comics, sexual psychopathology, lunatic feminine adornment." While Leider suspected Conner's motivations, he conceded that there existed "works in which his genuine sense of pity, terror and outrage is not hidden."[4]

Today, a careful scrutiny of his total output—especially the films—reveals Conner, the humanist. His work functions as a warning system, sensitizing us through his brilliant use of manipulated found footage, to the nature of public media's entropic vision. "We are in the era of information overload and it means information retrieval is more tricky than information recording . . ." (Nam June Paik) Conner is a genius at this kind of retrieval, as his first film *A Movie* (1958) proved. During the opening portion, he constructs a series of mini-films, each beginning and ending with titles, some ascribed to Bruce Conner, and each



parodying one common expectation that people have about the nature of movies. One shows an excerpt from a cowboy fiction film, another a snippet of a girlie-porno movie, another the technical identity of film itself (an emblematic use of leader), another a fragment of documentary or newsreel footage. Some are informed by ruthless satire, and all are distanced by a certain datedness. Thus, using these devices, Conner establishes a sense of critical perspective at the film's beginning.

His skill at blending ready-made sound sources with visuals is evident in all the films. The track for *A Movie,* Respighi's *Pines of Rome,* with its romantic, emotional dynamism, could easily destroy the potency and coherence of image; but instead Conner's judicious choice of sound excerpts enhances the drama inherent in each found scene. In the tight-rope walking sequence, for example, the fear the acrobats will fall is allayed by the music's delicate, mysterious tones emphasizing the moment's truly magical and gravity-defying properties. Some of the terrifying shots (a sinking ship, car crashes with drivers dismembered and mutilated, malaria victims pathetically shivering, Mussolini's body being hung up in a city square, a firing-squad execution, etc.) are given a sense of tragic dignity by the swell of the symphonic sound, but this feeling in turn is undercut by the interjection of absurd shots: a grotesque bicycle race or motorcycles plowing through mud.

In the hands of another artist, *A Movie* might

have become a didactic, apocalyptic message film, but Conner manages to open up his material to richer meanings, rather than pull in tight on a single denotation. For his concluding sequence, Conner chooses shots of a deep-sea diver exploring submarine ruins, an ambiguous (eerie but sensuous, somewhat exotic but also commonplace, etc.) image open to several interpretations—the archeologist, the survivor, the escapist, the news-reporter, the criminologist, etc. Conner manipulates this polyvalence, and our reflexive assumption that *we* are the survivors, to create some sense of hope and transcendence.

Similarly, the last scene in *Cosmic Ray* is rather a charming sequence showing a girl changing into numerous imaginative and delightful costumes, stressing her creative adaptability; the final image in the series shows someone holding up an American flag behind her head, a direct reference to the famous flag-raising at Iwo Jima, which was quoted earlier in the film.[5]

The subject matter of each shot in *Cosmic Ray* is only one (and often the lesser) part of its value, and often the content of the imagery is placed in subverted, satirical contexts. The basic metaphor of the film (if we can indeed assume that there is only one) should be the adage (fresher in 1961) "Make Love, Not War," rather than the mere structure of a sexual encounter. The irony of shooting guns is actively parodied by its juxtaposition with a *cartoon* image of a gun-orgasm, and, along with the pejorative verbal connotations of "mickey mouse," comes the shock of finding that this ready-made is actually a perverse tool for indoctrinating (or propagandizing) children. This tension is mirrored in the parallel shot which we could read as either a skull devouring the heroine's crotch or her giving birth to death, an ambiguity made both funnier and more grisly by her otherwise unstinted positive energy.

Indeed, the formal qualities of *Cosmic Ray* are at least as important as any content it may have. Throughout, the movie displays a raw, informal vigor. Images are superimposed several times, each element hand-held and rhythmically moving. Scratches and punch holes perforate the image, which is often "out of focus," streaked from loss of loop or "excessive" camera movement, and otherwise unacceptable by professional, establishment film standards. In the midst of this joyous riot of energy (with its fireworks and animated pearls) the interpolated found footage—whether hitch-hiking Indian chief, or no-brushing tooth-paste commercial, or marching troops or Disney cartoon—seems very artificial, the static camera positions, well-composed and well-exposed takes seeming to betray the kiss of death. Thus, on a purely formal level, Conner has achieved an antithesis between vitality and morbidity, and the vital trend definitely rises triumphant in the end.

In *Report*, the formal values again provide major support for the central idea expressed, namely that there is in fact no separation possible between a public event and the media through which we come to know of it. Conner emphasizes the *ambivalence* of the situation by flashing the title *Report* on the screen for only a few frames at the beginning of the film, reminding us that this word has two meanings, one of which (a gun shot) constitutes an event that lasts only a second, while the other meaning (the recounting of details about the event) will go on forever.

The first part of the film, accompanied by the sound of live radio commentary running in a credible chronological sequence from a moment before the assassination to the announcement of the President's death, is accompanied largely by looped images, but each loop is substantially different in effect, and rather than distancing us against the material, these repetitions engage (like the mini-movies prefacing *A Movie*) our critical perspectives to involve us in the incident, finally recreating, in a very intense fashion, the actual feeling of receiving that news for the first time. One of the loops, the basic motorcade shot of the Kennedy car passing while Jack and Jackie wave, is repeated in such a way that each time it progresses slightly beyond the previous run, and each time cuts back to a proportionately later starting point; this hypnotic vortex of re-surging action is counterpointed by one man's account of seeing the assassination, which takes him several minutes to re-tell, even though the event itself must have taken only the short moment comparable to the un-looped version of the footage we are watching. Another loop, showing exactly the same footage of Oswald's gun being carried past the camera, is counterpointed by a newscaster enumerating the different types of policemen's weapons at the scene, thus emphasizing the simplicity of the

image opposed to the multiplicity of the verbal description. The long flicker sequence shows alternating frames of black and white gradually modulating to pulsating half-frames of grey and white that finally flutter out to simple grey; as we listen to the description of the President's car rushing off to the hospital, we realize that these throbbing vibrations function both photokinetically to engage us directly in the shock of the occasion, and also in a fictional mode to represent the waning and dying life-force of the victim. Academy leader, which ordinarily provides a measured count-down interval before the picture itself begins, is repeated precisely because "the picture itself" (i.e., substantial information about the events of the shooting, news of the President's death, etc.) has not yet taken shape, and we hear on the track a newsman who is biding his time, treading water, struggling to occupy the air-report time with some words that will fill in until the full picture is assembled.

By the time the second portion of the film begins, the viewer has been so sensitized that even the briefest fragments of film in the caustic collage have telling impact. The nature of the collage itself represents another phenomenon in news reporting—the merging of the special, stellar event into the mainstream of media programming. Conner uses pieces of commercials, newsreels, a bullfight "travelogue," and other imagery common to television in order to counterpoint an account of the Kennedy arrival in Dallas, suggesting by precise synchronization and juxtaposition that the materialistic elements in society have ritually slain the hero. In this context, *Report,* despite its bitter sarcasm, manages to establish itself as a heartfelt elegy.

Though *A Movie, Cosmic Ray,* and *Report* are the most frequently discussed of Conner's films, it is important to remember that a whole second trend co-exists in his artistic output, balancing the cynicism of the baby burned in its high-chair with a globe covered in delicate mandala patterns, balancing the violence and shock of *A Movie* and *Report* with purely sensuous films like *Breakaway,* lyrical and meditative films like *Looking for Mushrooms* and *Easter Morning Raga,* and simply comic films like *Permian Strata.* In terms of his personal activities one can also counter Conner the political activist with Conner the light-show performer. Thus, it seems worthy to keep in mind that *Crossroads* was released simultaneously with a short film, *5:10 to Dreamland,* which is also composed of black-and-white found footage but which, unlike the almost bombastic grandeur of *Crossroads,* concentrates on gentle, exquisite images (a feather borne aloft by the hot air of a radiator, a high-school gym girl reflected in a mirror, etc.) blending in a tranquil fashion reminiscent of the work of Joseph Cornell and Peter Hutton. The persistence of these two side-by-side trends in Conner's work tends to validate the contemplative stance of the closing portion of *Crossroads,* which we might be suspicious of if we had access only to the more scathing aspects.

Crossroads also represents (as does *Five Times Marilyn*) extensive reworking of material used fragmentarily in *A Movie.* After coming to know the nature and importance of the imagery in *Crossroads* our appreciation of the implications of the montage in *A Movie* and *Report* becomes more acute. Half a dozen short takes from the *Crossroads* footage occur during a central section of *A Movie:* a submarine submerges; a captain looks through the periscope; Marilyn Monroe is seen vamping on a bed; the captain seems excited and pushes a button; a torpedo shoots through the water; an A-bomb goes off in several different takes, ending with the shot of the tidal wave engulfing a battleship (from the closing sequence of *Crossroads*); a surfer is wiped out by a modest breaker; fishing boats are overturned by waves; etc. The closing collage of *Report* presents the bomb blast with the commentary "we have a brilliant sun today," reminding us of Conner's political awareness. He avoids the pitfalls of apocalyptic thinking by mingling the smaller-scale human foibles (perverse sexuality, thrill sports) together with medium-size (submarine warfare) and gigantic (A-bomb warfare) events, through humor rather than terrorism, placing the responsibility directly on the humans who create these phenomena for themselves, and challenging us to draw from this nuclear slapstick an expanded compassion commensurate with our technological crossroads.

> One has the impression that it is not too crude a simplification of the state of affairs to assert that for the first time in the course of history man on earth faces only himself, that he finds no longer any other partner or foe. —Werner Heisenberg

NOTES

1. W.A. Shurcliff. *Bombs at Bikini, The Official Report of Operation Crossroads.* New York, 1947. pp. 151-52.
2. Terry Riley. RAINBOW IN CURVED AIR, Columbia Records, New York.
3. Rosalind Krauss. *Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism. October.* Spring, 1976, New York. Krauss acknowledges that the last fifteen years of art writing has not comprehensively examined a body of work "which conflates psychologistic and formal means to achieve very particular ends. The art of Robert Rauchenberg is a case in point."
4. Philip Leider. "Bruće Conner: A New Sensibility," *Artforum*, Nov.-Dec. 1962.
5. In its original version, this last sequence is in color, further emphasizing or re-enforcing its positive creative triumph; Conner also prepared the film originally as a three-screen loop event, so that two supportive side panels flanked the movie as it is most often shown, and the whole length of the film was repeated several times. Conner hardly thinks of the film in any definitive or superior state, and sold the three-screen reels in 8mm so that they could be projected at 5-frame-per-second speeds with separate sounds.

RANDAL JOHNSON

Brazilian Cinema Today

In *Tent of Miracles* (1977), Cinema Novo founder Nelson Pereira dos Santos's twelfth feature film, there is a scene in which poet/journalist/film-maker Fausto Pena tries frantically to telephone Robert Farias, real-life director of Embrafilme (the Brazilian State Film Enterprise), in order to arrange financing for the film he is making about the until-then obscure Bahian sociologist Pedro Archanjo. On the wall beside the telephone there is a poster of a David Cardoso film entitled *Loved and Violated*, a soft-core porn murder mystery released in 1976. This scene is reflective of an all too recent phase of Brazilian cinema in which the country's highly moralistic military government, through Embrafilme, was literally financing poor quality pornographic films while more serious film-makers, especially those linked to the Cinema Novo movement, were confronting an unofficial blacklisting and were having extreme difficulty financing their own projects. Many of them consequently had to look outside of Brazil for backers for their films. Like the Cinema Novo directors, Fausto Pena, with his more culturally valid film, is apparently ignored by Embrafilme.

In reality, there seem to have been changes in Embrafilme's financing policy since Roberto Farias, himself an experienced film-maker (*Assault on the Pay Train*, 1962), assumed the entity's directorship several years ago. Farias's Embrafilme has, in fact, become a major factor in what has been called a policy of "detente" between Cinema Novo film-makers and the military regime. Nelson Pereira dos Santos evidently did not have as much trouble reaching Farias as does Fausto Pena in his film: *Tent of Miracles* was partially financed by Embrafilme.

Due to the seemingly contradictory nature of the current "rapprochement" between certain members of Cinema Novo (notably Glauber Rocha, who has recently referred to the military as the "legitimate representatives" of the Brazilian people) and the regime, heated debates have taken place over the last few years concerning the role of the state in the Brazilian film industry. Cinema Novo in general, and Glauber Rocha in particular, has been widely accused of selling out to the government and of having lost faith in the initial propositions of the movement. The position of Rocha and Cinema Novo is somewhat more understandable, however, when seen in the light of the historical evolution of the movement.[1]

Cinema Novo, with its highly intellectualized films oriented toward a critical vision of Brazilian reality (i.e., underdevelopment and its causes), failed to make a significant dent in the stranglehold maintained by the multinational film corporations on the internal film market. If the "disinherited masses" were on the screen in early

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Cinema Novo films (e.g., Nelson Pereira dos Santos's *Barren Lives*, 1963), they were certainly not in the audience viewing the films. After the 1964 coup, the movement turned inward toward self-criticism and analyses of the failure of the intellectual left *vis-à-vis* the military takeover (e.g., Paulo César Saraceni's *The Challenge*, 1965). At that point, the masses were neither on the screen nor in the audience. As explicitly political cinema became increasingly impossible under military rule, Cinema Novo films became more and more allegorical (e.g., Walter Lima, Jr.'s *Brazil Year 2000*, 1969), and, with the exception of Joaquim Pedro de Andrade's *Macunaima* (1969), the movie-going public—a public ideologically conditioned by years of Hollywood's products—became increasingly alienated from national cinema.

Film-makers associated with Cinema Novo realized that since they had decided to use commercial channels for the exhibition of their films, they had an absolute necessity of reaching and communicating with a broad public. Among steps taken during the late sixties was the formation, with producer Luiz Carlos Barreto, of the distribution cooperative Difilm. Films began to be made in color,[2] and humor was used as establishing an initial level of film/spectator communication (e.g., *Macunaima*). The problem still existed, however, that exhibition circuits were structured in such a way as to maintain foreign control of the internal market. Independent production, one of the mainstays of the Cinema Novo program, was by and large too precarious a venture to enable the films to compete successfully with the multinationals. Brazilian cinema thus began to look increasingly toward the state for protectionist measures and, eventually, direct financial support through aid in distribution and other forms of financing.

Glauber Rocha, for example, has always favored a large role for the state in Brazilian film production. In a recent article, Rocha is quoted as saying:

> I think that Brazilian cinema should be controlled by the State because cinema is a cultural fact of collective interest. It cannot remain in private hands, because under capitalism private interests want only to accumulate profits by exploiting the public. It can be argued that under the difficult conditions of censorship which Brazilian cinema endures, State control has repressed creativity. But it just so happens that there is no capitalist cinema in Brazil because the Brazilian market is occupied by foreign cinema. . . . No international film costs less than a million dollars. With that amount we can make ten films in Brazil. Private cinema, in Brazil, depends on the help of the State.[3]

Rocha does not seem to differentiate, however, between varying forms of governments and the implications of state control under these different forms. Surely state control in Cuba does not mean the same thing as state control in Brazil under the current regime, which has based its own economic policy on a strong role for multinational corporations.

Until recently, with the fusion of the National Institute of Cinema and Embrafilme under the leadership of Roberto Farias, government involvement was limited to protectionist legislation reserving a certain number of exhibition days for national films (now 112 days per year—up 100% over the 1963 figure of 56 days per year) and some small financial awards based largely on the "quality" and commercial success of the national product. Under Farias, Cinema Novo had an ally in Embrafilme and thus ended, to a large extent, its reluctance to accept government financing (and the government, on the other hand, apparently ended its reluctance to finance Cinema Novo participants). Film-maker, critic and Cinema Novo-advocate Gustavo Dahl (*The Brave Warrior*, 1968) is currently head of Embrafilme's distribution section and is widely considered to be a leading candidate to succeed Farias. Cinema Novo is thus, in a sense, in power, and it continues to maintain intellectual hegemony in Brazilian cinema. Many of the most important films being made today in Brazil carry names as familiar as Andrade, Guerra, Diegues, Saraceni, Dos Santos and, yes, Rocha, who is now completing his first feature since returning to Brazil in 1976.

The situation of these film-makers is nevertheless still quite contradictory. As Nelson Pereira dos Santos told me in an interview given at the 1977 New York Film Festival, where his *Tent of Miracles* was screened:

> Our own work is very much linked to what we are living today. It is influenced by all sorts of daily pressures of Brazilian society—specifically on the

> intellectual and all the contradictions which surround him. We receive money from the government to make films, but we do not support this kind of government. We are in fact viscerally opposed to this kind of regime. But at the same time we continue making films in an attempt to go forward according to our own initial propositions, but then we find the censors of this same government waiting for us at the corner. This type of contradiction is lived not only by film-makers, but by composers of popular music, writers—in short, by all creative artists in Brazil. The Brazilian intellectual lives through all of this and I believe that the average Brazilian also lives through it in another sense. The intellectual is conscious of the fact and reasons about his own situation, but I think that this existential circumstance is common to all Brazilians.

This problem is one of the many raised by Dos Santos himself in *Tent of Miracles*. Although the film was partially financed by Embrafilme, the director has mixed feelings about the role of the state in Brazilian cinema. In an interview granted to the newsweekly *Veja* (27 July 1977), he says that Embrafilme's current policy could go either way, toward a true realization of the development of a strong national cinema, or toward the mere protection of special interests. It is too early to tell.

There is no doubt whatsoever as to the box-office success of recent Brazilian cinema after the immense popularity of films like Carlos Diegues's *Xica da Silva* (1976).[5] But the question must still be asked to what extent film-makers once associated with Cinema Novo have abandoned their original propositions in favor of popular success? The best way to answer this question is to examine one of the most important films of the current phase of production, Dos Santos's *Tent of Miracles*.

Considered by many to be his most important film since *Barren Lives*, *Tent of Miracles* is based on a novel by Bahian writer Jorge Amado. The film is a continuation of a project begun by Dos Santos with his previous film, *The Amulet of Ogum* (1974), in which he used Afro-Brazilian religion as a starting point in the formation of what he called, in a manifesto written to coincide with the 1974 film, a "popular cinema." In the manifesto, Dos Santos argued that films should adopt a popular point of view as a means of affirming both Brazilian cinema and Brazilian popular culture. This idea differs from the original propositions of Cinema Novo in that it no longer tolerates the sociological distance which was common to earlier phases of the movement and which resulted in an overly intellectualized and inaccessible cinema. Rather than looking at the people from the outside and criticizing society through them, the camera should now adopt the people's point of view, to the extent possible, and criticize society from their perspective. It is an attempt to see Brazilian society as the people see it and to break away from the colonized ideas which have been imposed on the Brazilian mentality over the years. In the *Veja* interview, the director explains: "*The Amulet of Ogum* was the search for my origins—where do I come from, who are my parents, what are my roots, how do I undo the repression I have been subjected to in school, in the university?" He decided to use Afro-Brazilian religion as a starting point, since it is a sentiment which, so to speak, comes from the roots and is at the same time a cultural expression that has been repressed throughout Brazil's history by a religious form at the service of the colonizer. According to Dos Santos, "it was the first thing we used since it could give us a global vision and also a way of thinking in relation to all of Brazilian society." *Tent of Miracles*, even more than *The Amulet of Ogum*, documents the struggle of Afro-Brazilian religion against the continued repression of the Catholic church and the state. The project to develop a popular cinema in these terms has not been totally successful since the structure of the internal market has largely impeded the desired public from seeing the films. *The Amulet of Ogum* was considered by exhibitors to be an intellectual film, and was thus shown only in middle and upper-middle class areas of Brazilian cities. The director feels, however, that the film did serve the purpose of affirming *umbanda* as a valid religious practice, something that had not previously been accomplished in Brazilian cinema. *Tent of Miracles*, released in Brazil in October 1977, has been much more successful in reaching the public than was Dos Santos's previous film.

Other recent Brazilian films have also dealt with the problem of racism in that country. Carlos Diegues's *Xica da Silva* (1976) and Antunes Filho's *Time of Waiting* (1973) come immediately to mind. Diegues's film deals with racism as a secondary topic. Antunes Filho's film stays on the

level of denunciation in an extremely violent critique of racial attitudes in Brazilian society. *Tent of Miracles* goes beyond both of these films in that it deals directly with racism but does not remain on the level of criticism. Instead, it passes to a higher level of the affirmation of "minority" cultures and their contribution to the formation of modern Brazil. The final sequence of the film is a beautiful homage to the Brazilian people—a people derived from the mixture of African, Indian, and European blood. The sequence shows a procession commemorating Bahian independence passing through the streets of Salvador past an arch with the words "Independence or Death" inscribed on it. Bahia was the site, in 1823, of the only struggle for independence that Brazil witnessed, as a militia of blacks, Indians and white Brazilians fought Portuguese troops who had remained loyal to the king even after Dom Pedro's declaration of independence the year before. As the camera focuses on the faces of children moving through the streets, the significance of racial mixing for the formation (and future) of Brazilian society becomes very clear.

Tent of Miracles, with its affirmation of Brazilian popular culture, is an important step in the continued process of the decolonization of Brazilian cinema. Recent developments in that country have shown that it can compete on an equal basis with the best foreign cinema has to offer. As Roberto Farias puts it, Brazilian cinema "has ceased being a foreign product in its own market."[6]

NOTES

1. Despite the many death certificates issued for the Cinema Novo movement, the label is still useful to distinguish a certain kind of Brazilian cinema which maintains a substantially critical attitude toward society from the purely commerical cinema which is also being produced in Brazil. Many of the cineastes included in the first category are either original participants in the movement or are linked to it in other ways. My continued use of the term is in line with Nelson Pereira dos Santos, who says in an interview published in the newsweekly *Veja* (27 July 1977): "Cinema Novo has not died, because it is not an aesthetic school, but rather a method of cinematographic action, as was neo-realism. Neo-realism understood that within a capitalist society it is possible to practice, through cinema, a humanistic, transforming mode of thought. That was the great lesson of neo-realism . . . And Cinema Novo is the application of the method in Brazil."
2. Leon Hirszman's *Girl from Ipanema* (1967), with a screenplay by Glauber Rocha, Vinícius de Morais, Eduardo Coutinho and Hirszman, was the first film by a Cinema Novo participant to be made in color.
3. Quoted by M. Pontes in "Deus e o Diablo no tempo do exílio," *Jornal do Brasil*, 13 December 1975.
4. Eduardo Escorel edited many important Cinema Novo films (e.g., Rocha's *Land in Anguish*, Andrade's *Macunaima*, Diegues's *The Inheritors*) before directing *Lesson of Love*, his first feature film. The film, as yet unreleased in the United States, won many awards as the best Brazilian film of 1976.
5. *Dona Flor* is the largest grossing film in the history of cinema in Brazil, surpassing international films such as *Jaws*. It was produced by Luiz Carlos Barreto, whose role in the formation of Cinema Novo and in the current success of Brazilian cinema has yet to be fully appreciated in this country.
6. In *Mercado Comun do Cinema: Una Proposta Brasileira* (Rio do Janeiro: Embrafilme, 1977), p. 7.

Reviews

TENT OF MIRACLES

Director: Nelson Pereira dos Santos. Script: Dos Santos, from a novel by Jorge Amado. Producer: Ney Sant'anna. Photography: Helio Silva. Music: Gilberto Gil, Jards Macale.

Tent of Miracles, the latest work by Brazilian writer-director Nelson Pereira dos Santos *(Vidas Secas, How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman)* recently screened at Filmex, is one of a rare breed —a brilliant political film that succeeds in raising the consciousness of its audience and yet is thoroughly enjoyable to watch. Its appeal is multi-dimensional—it confronts us directly with ideology, moves us with its narrative through a wide range of emotions, amuses us with satire, both blatant and subtle, dazzles us with visuals, stirs us with sambas, baffles us with magic, catches us in stereotyped responses, and demystifies the Brazilian social structure. The film develops a consciousness that is painfully aware of the pervasive injustice, corruption and hype and yet, instead of righteously denouncing all characters who are in any way tainted with these vices or cynically rejecting all values and efforts because they are limited, it powerfully affirms human life and perceptively evaluates various positive steps that can be taken to build a better world. Its comprehensive social analysis is combined with a

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level of denunciation in an extremely violent critique of racial attitudes in Brazilian society. *Tent of Miracles* goes beyond both of these films in that it deals directly with racism but does not remain on the level of criticism. Instead, it passes to a higher level of the affirmation of "minority" cultures and their contribution to the formation of modern Brazil. The final sequence of the film is a beautiful homage to the Brazilian people—a people derived from the mixture of African, Indian, and European blood. The sequence shows a procession commemorating Bahian independence passing through the streets of Salvador past an arch with the words "Independence or Death" inscribed on it. Bahia was the site, in 1823, of the only struggle for independence that Brazil witnessed, as a militia of blacks, Indians and white Brazilians fought Portuguese troops who had remained loyal to the king even after Dom Pedro's declaration of independence the year before. As the camera focuses on the faces of children moving through the streets, the significance of racial mixing for the formation (and future) of Brazilian society becomes very clear.

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comic tolerance and penetrating humanism that are reminiscent of Renoir.

Although *Tent of Miracles* is primarily focused on racial issues (most particularly, the struggle to retain Brazil's African heritage), it masterfully blends them with sexual politics on at least three levels. The film explicitly identifies sex as an ideological weapon—for the primary position of its hero Pedro Archanjo is that racial crossbreeding is the best way to solve Brazil's political problems. Narratively, visually, and musically, it celebrates sexual vitality as a major national resource, particularly as it is embodied in Archanjo, who couples with women of all colors, and Ana Mercedes, a fiery mulatta who is called the best living example of Archanjo's theory. More implicitly, the film explores sexual stereotypes, frequently making visual contrasts between males and females in the same situation and narratively linking the dynamics of sexism and racism. At every level of style and content, the film reaffirms crossbreeding—in its characterizations, its mixture of conventions and tones, its highly varied music that ranges from African drums and hot sambas to ponderous operatic arias, and its openness to every combination—of ideology and instinct, logic and magic, materialism and music, dogma and dance.

Although the story adapts a novel by Jorge Amada, the structure of the film is based on *Citizen Kane*. The first scene with Archanjo, set in the forties, shows us how he dies. The rest of the film tries to explain who he was, incorporating multiple contradictory perspectives. The search is led by a man working for a newspaper, who eventually makes a movie about "the great man." At the end we are left with the sense that the full truth about him lies far beyond the consciousness of both his friends and his biographers. In adapting it to his Brazilian subject, Pereira dos Santos politicizes this structure. Unlike Welles's hero Kane/Hearst, Pedro Archanjo is not great, powerful, or infamous in a conventional sense. Rather, he is an obscure sociologist-philosopher without degrees—a skinny, plain featured, toffee-colored mulatto who does not look like a hero. The problem in *Tent of Miracles* is how to make this man, who is an anti-hero by conventional standards because he is poor, black, unknown, unambitious, and ordinary looking, into a popular hero of a commercial film that can be successfully sold and distributed within a capitalist society. His true extraordinary qualities—intelligence, originality, courage, openness, flexibility—unfortunately won't help much. This marketing miracle is accomplished through a frame story (a strategy that proved successful in *Citizen Kane*), in which poet Fausto Pena makes a film about Archanjo. This frame is not just another fashionable example of self-reflexiveness, but is used very cleverly to raise the political consciousness of the film-makers and their audience.

The stories of Archanjo the scientist and Pena the artist make the same political point because they grow out of the same society that is dominated by the same forces. Brazilians are ashamed of their culture and want to pretend they are white. Thus, the intellectual elite never heard of Archanjo until he is mentioned in an interview by a white Nobel Prize winner named Dr. Livingstone—an American anthropologist from Columbia University, whose handsome appearance (a masculine pipe jutting out of a well-trimmed blond beard and a muscular build in well-fitted tweeds) immediately qualifies him as a scientist/hero. Although this blue-eyed devil speaks with a comic nasal inflection that establishes him as a fool, he nevertheless utters the truth—*viz.*, that Archanjo is an important philosopher, that it's absurd that Brazilians have never heard of him, that Ana Mercedes is living proof that he was right. Despite the fact that his anthropological training has theoretically enabled him to avoid ethnocentrism, he behaves more like his missionary namesake. Livingstone turns out to be a hateful gringo who callously exploits the Brazilians he supposedly admires,

Pedro Archanjo at a candomble.

turning Ana Mercedes into his whore and Pena, her fiancé, into his flunky research assistant, the same subservient role that Archanjo was forced to play at the University. Because appearances may or may not be deceiving (the magnetic beauty of Ana Mercedes is authentic while Dr. Livingstone's is all "frosting," yet the unheroic ordinariness of Pena and Archanjo is misleading in both cases) and because of the contradictory nature of what we are told (that Ana Mercedes is a whore, a glittering idiot, and the best example of crossbreeding; that Pena is a celebrated poet, a cowardly cuckold, and a reactionary fool who prostitutes his talent; that Livingstone is a Nobel Prize winner and a stupid gringo; that Archanjo is the greatest scientist in the world and a powerful magician/priest, an irresponsible gambler and a glamorous black stud), we are forced to take a critical attitude toward everything we see and hear and to actively evaluate these characters for ourselves.

The first question raised by the film is: who is the Hero or what is the central focus? The images behind the opening titles introduce the key polarities that lie in the film's historical background; we see a progression of still photographs of Brazilian ancestors contrasting European masters and African slaves, men and women, black and white and color. Then we are exposed to the material reality—a ribbon of celluloid moving through an editing machine. Finally, we meet our first candidate for protagonist; Fausto Pena sits at the editing table, clearly in control while watching footage of his film on Archanjo with his assistant named Dada, who functions like an audience. Deep in the background we glimpse Ana Mercedes, who can be seen either as a muse or distraction, but in either case, like most women in conventional movies, she seems to be playing a subordinate role. Dada explicitly tells us that Pena could pass more readily for a hero than his subject Archanjo. But both agree that the one who really looks the part is Dr. Livingstone, who stars in the first footage we see from the inner film. The scene is a press conference where the American first informs both the Brazilians and us in the audience that Pedro Archanjo is the authentic hero both for the society and for the film. At the press conference, Pena and Ana Mercedes are part of the audience. When Ana Mercedes immediately rushes forward to Livingstone like a groupie, another woman calls her a whore and Pena retreats in shame. On one level, of course, the charge is just. Ana Mercedes trades her body for an exclusive interview with the scientist, but it turns out he is more interested in photographing her like a rare species of animal and she is the one with the stronger sexual desire. Pena perceives what is happening but lets the gringo sleep with his fiancée in exchange for a job. While at first he might appear to be acting as a pimp, from another perspective it is actually Ana Mercedes who is pimping for Pena, whose writing talents are being bought. The film forces us to see the complicity of all its characters while still recognizing their values: the gringo speaks the truth and supports Archanjo's political ideas; Ana Mercedes is more sexually liberated and honest than the men around her; Pena grows as an artist in the process of making his film.

All of these characters are measured against Archanjo, who emerges as the Super Protean hero capable of many transformations—philosopher, priest, scientist, magician, drunkard, stud, gambler, godfather, journalist, brawler, anthropologist. He is the rebellious *Archangel* who succeeds in fighting fascist tyranny at all levels of society—from the university faculty to Hitler's Third Reich. He celebrates crossbreeding because it produces strong individuals who can "master despair and misery by being creative in daily life." Extraordinary creatures like Archanjo, who can absorb and transcend ideology—whether Christian or African, Fascist or Marxist—and still remain open to other individuals and cultures. In contrast to the courageous Marxist professor who defends our hero at the Academy, Archanjo has lost his faith but not his spirit for he insists on loving the people instead of dogma. Within him he carries the sound of the drums just as the Marxist carries his books. Hence, Archanjo can function as a priest without being restricted by religious doctrines; he has a sincere passion for the ceremonies and rituals, which he uses in his political struggles. Just as he is both black and white, Archanjo is capable of holding two contradictory theories at the same time; he tries to retain the tribal practices and spiritual power of his African heritage and to unify them with Western rationalism and science. He warns his Marxist friend that his rigid mate-

rialism might transform him into a policeman or fascist. Although the Marxist retains his radical ideas and humanistic instincts, he begins to lose his courage when his social position rises and he has more to risk. But as Pena emphasizes, since Archanjo's identity is never fixed in any one social role or persona, he remains true to his ideas and courageously stands up at the key moments of crisis throughout his life. Although *Tent of Miracles* succeeds in selling Archanjo as a mythic hero, the film simultaneously demystifies the process of myth-building by showing its corruption. We can all readily scoff at the commercial for a male deodorant called "Fresh Black," the essay contest for first graders telling why Archanjo is a great man, a shopping center that uses his name, and a centennial celebration that tries to transform him into another profitable Jesus. The exploitive nature of Pena's film is more ambiguous. Although he gets the idea while doing a commercial newspaper story, gathers the research while working for Livingstone, and distorts or omits some of the facts in order to please the distributors, his film nevertheless grows increasingly responsible as Pena becomes more involved with Archanjo. He starts out selling the date of Pedro's birth to the promoters and ends up insuring that the myth retains the most important truths. Pereira dos Santos clearly implies that his own film *Tent of Miracles* shares in the hype and forces critics like me to admit that so does this commentary. While I may earnestly be trying to spread the word that this is a movie to be widely seen and that Archanjo is a character to be strongly admired (even though his myth includes lies, distortions, and omissions), I am also using this review to fatten my own pocketbook, bibliography, and ego. Archanjo, Pena, and Pereira dos Santos are no purists, and neither are we viewers—that's the whole point. The film celebrates crossbreeding and mixed forms as the best solution to racism, democracy, and film-making.

This process is dramatized in the scene where Pena and his film crew tape a brain-storming session on Archanjo, in which they try to reconcile the conflicting aspects of his character and behavior. In trying to explain the hero, each character reveals a great deal about him or herself and their own conception of freedom. This scene encourages us in the audience to do the same and yet forces us to be conscious of our own limitations in the process. As his name suggests, Fausto Pena is the masochistic scholar who is willing to sell his soul and sacrifice his woman in order to gain greater knowledge and power. In this scene, he is most concerned with gathering as much data as possible from the others to enrich his own vision of Archanjo. When one young crew member, who is proud of his radicalism, has great difficulty understanding how Archanjo could have had an affair with a Scandinavian woman, Ana Mercedes insists it was a question of lust without reference to color. Although we might suspect her of projecting her own ideas of sexual freedom onto the hero, we realize that many members of the audience would condemn her sexuality simply because she is a woman. Like Archanjo, Ana Mercedes enjoys lovers of all races and classes; convincingly played by Sonia Dias, who looks like a young Lena Horne, she possesses an extraordinary range of sexuality that is expressed in the way she moves, especially at the candomblé where she is highly responsive to the magical forces of the samba. Pena promises Ana Mercedes that she can play all of Archanjo's women—the magical Rosa de Oxalá, whom Ana Mercedes suspects was Pedro's great love; Dorothea, the young mother of Tadeo, who inherits his father's intelligence and turns out to be the right-hand man of the mayor of Rio; and even the blond-braided "white beetle" named Kirsi, whose son Pedro hopes will grow up to be the King of Scandinavia. While Pena uses this promise as a bribe for sexual favors, it still reaffirms what the gringo Livingstone could perceive—that Ana Mercedes possesses the same kind of protean, transformational power as Archanjo. While her use of it is restricted primarily to sexuality, she nevertheless has a positive receptivity that, as Wilhelm Reich suggested, is almost instinctive in women but which can offer a valuable political lesson to men—a lesson that was strongly urged by Pedro Archanjo and that is demonstrated in the brainstorming session. When the discussion is interrupted by the mother of one of the crew members, we at first expect that she will make a fool of herself because she looks like a conventional upper-middle-class housewife. But, when she delivers a stirring speech about Archanjo, reminding us that he was always poor and socially oppressed, we are forced to confront our own

prejudices against this individual, which are based solely on her sex and her class.

In *Tent of Miracles,* the audience repeatedly encounters female characters, whose appearance and social personae make us assume that they are objects of satire and ridicule, but whose basic instincts turn out to be more progressive than those of the men around them in the same class or condition. In the scene where the Police Chief is on his death bed, the white doctors dressed in black stand on one side of the bed reciting their useless medical jargon while the black maids in white express their grief in chants and prayers to Oxalá; the female members of the dying man's family cross class and racial lines to join the women in their outcries of pain. This pattern is developed more fully with the Countess of Brusca and Mrs. Edelweiss.

The Countess first appears as a grotesque caricature of a frivolous Francophile. As we hear mocking bird calls, we see a painted, befeathered middle-aged woman flirting with our hero and asking to be taken to a macumba. When she actually attends one (to celebrate Tadeo's graduation from engineering school), instead of doing a samba, she performs a ludicrous can can. Yet, this eccentric Brazilian aristocrat, who turns out to be the cousin of Archanjo's chief academic enemy Nilo Argolo, strongly supports Pedro's arguments for crossbreeding by exposing the African roots of her own family and class. When Pedro's son Tadeo marries Lou Gomes, the daughter of one of the best so-called "white" families, the Countess holds the reception in her home; like a Matisse painting, the decor presents a riotous clash of conflicting patterns and textures, combining artifacts from all over the world. It provides exactly the right setting for this interracial coupling.

We first see Mrs. Edelweiss, an attractive bourgeois intellectual, at Livingstone's press conference, where she is enchanted with the hero like the rest of the audience. She is singled out, however, in a later scene where she interviews the young American and where we realize that, were it not for her middle-class repression, she could easily be transformed into a groupie like Ana Mercedes. The commercial promoters of the Archanjo centennial select her as president of their committee, undoubtedly seeing her as an appealing figurehead who can easily be manipulated. Delighted with her new job, she earnestly proposes a Seminar on Brazilian Racial Democracy as the main event of the celebration; clearly she is a naive liberal who is taken in by their hype. Up to this point, she seems to be an object of satire who cannot be taken seriously. When she comes to the office of the promoters to discuss her plans, they also refuse to take her seriously; they treat her, not as a human being or as a professor (which we only *now* learn that she is), but as a woman. Putting on their jackets and their false smiles, they graciously kiss her hand, shower her with compliments, and flirtatiously sidle up beside her, before giving her the bad news—that her seminar must be cancelled. Then we cut to a close-up of her face, which suddenly drops the simpering smile of her social persona and reveals her sincere disappointment. Her consciousness continues to be raised in a later scene where she learns of their plans for exploiting Archanjo and demands explanations; realizing that all their answers are bullshit, she drops her polite mask and bluntly tells them, "Fuck you!" At this moment we see a quick montage of three female images— a close-up of Edelweiss's angry face, a glamorous poster of a sex symbol like Ursula Andress posed seductively with a deadly weapon, and the cute little first grader reciting her winning essay on Archanjo. The humanity of Edelweiss has been revealed despite the social stereotypes that would make us dismiss her as a sex object or child. The film ends with Edelweiss at the celebration for our hero, frowning at the distortions and the hype but applauding his authentic contributions to Brazilian Racial Democracy. She emerges as the model for the bourgeois members of the audience, whose political consciousness is to be raised and whose authentic feelings and humanity are to be liberated from restrictive social personae.

Pereira dos Santos's visual and audio choices are very effective in developing his political theme and reinforcing Archanjo's ideas. When Pedro kisses his Scandinavian lover Kirsi for the first time, we see the lovers framed by an arch against a pale blue sea as we hear the sound of the waves blended with African drums. Although this composition could be seen merely as a pretty, decorative shot, it also heightens the black/white contrast, for the arch separates the bright patch of

sunlight from the darkness that surrounds it. While the arch protectively shelters the couple's first moment of intimate contact, it also restricts the image to part of the screen just as their affair is only a minor episode in the narrative.

These stylistic choices are later echoed in another scene of interracial coupling when Pedro's son Tadeo asks Captain Gomes for the hand of his daughter Lou. The two men stand on opposite sides of a window, through which we see the serene pastel landscape and hear the sound of the waves; but this time, instead of the pulsing African drums, we hear operatic singing, which is used periodically through the film to deflate the "white" Brazilian's sense of racial purity. In this scene, this is precisely the force that keeps the young lovers apart.

Later, when Captain Gomes informs his wife of Tadeo's outrageous proposal, the aristocrats symmetrically stand facing the young black man on opposite sides of an open doorway, through which we see a cross on a religious altar, which sanctifies their rejection. Beside each parent is a formal portrait—the Captain stands in front of a gentleman, his wife in front of a lady—as if these still works of art provide the models for their behavior. Meanwhile, the opera continues on the sound track, as if setting the tone for the Captain's impassioned dismissal of Tadeo.

This scene also echoes visual choices in earlier sequences. For example, in a café the screen is neatly bisected by a wall, separating Pena on the left, with pictures representing his Christian heritage hanging on the wall behind him, and Ana Mercedes seated on the right in front of pictures of her black ancestors. This use of still photographs ultimately goes back to the images behind the titles at the opening of the film, which clearly established the historical roots of the drama. They also provide visual irony for the final sequence at the centennial celebration, where we see Archanjo immortalized in one of these formal portraits that clothes him in respectable academic robes, strips him of his vitality and uniqueness, and transforms him into a conventional "national hero." This frozen image contrasts sharply with Pena's picture of Pedro Archanjo, which is *moving* is both senses of the term. As if to insure that Archanjo lives on as the spirit of Bahia, behind the titles at the end of the film we see the vital moving images of carnival—the rich mixture of races, sexes, classes, colors, and styles that gives modern Brazil its creative energy. —MARSHA KINDER

OPENING NIGHT

Written and directed by John Cassavetes. Producer and cinematographer: Al Ruban. Faces International.

John Cassavetes's new film is highly ambitious in its basic conception, yet terribly disappointing in its realization. This is particularly devastating since the main conflict in the film is between the writer's static vision recorded in the script and the players' improvisation embodied in a living performance. We are supposed to feel that the actors triumph as Gina Rowlands and her co-star John Cassavetes boldly revise the final scene on stage during their opening night performance while playwright Joan Blondell and director Ben Gazarra sit helplessly in the audience. Although the Broadway packed house enthusiastically applauds their spontaneous creation, most moviegoers are more likely to find it a rehash or almost a parody of what we've already seen work effectively in earlier Cassavetes movies. Hence the film ends up convincing us of exactly the opposite of what was intended—the value of careful artistic conceptualization and the limits of improvisation.

The opening of the film is brilliant. We watch Gina Rowlands standing nervously in the wings and then follow her as she goes on stage before a live audience in New Haven. *Opening Night* immediately plunges us into a double reality of stage and screen and a double perspective on the performance. At first we identify with the actress: we share her nervous anticipation and see the audience from her point of view. But as soon as she begins to interact with Cassavetes, we resume our more familiar role as audience and become involved with the film through exposure to the play. Thus we are forced to impose on ourselves the schizoid split between actor and viewer—the very process of doubling that will become so crucial for the central characters both in the play and in the film.

The dramatic situation within the play (entitled *The Second Woman*) is typical of Cassavetes movies. A middle-aged woman, who is slightly

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sunlight from the darkness that surrounds it. While the arch protectively shelters the couple's first moment of intimate contact, it also restricts the image to part of the screen just as their affair is only a minor episode in the narrative.

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The dramatic situation within the play (entitled *The Second Woman*) is typical of Cassavetes movies. A middle-aged woman, who is slightly

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tipsy, comes home to a tacky modern dwelling that she shares with a self-centered man. Although she confesses that she has stopped in a bar for a drink and tries to express her present anguished emotional state of being, he is more interested in discussing his work as a photographer, which is represented by three huge black and white blow-ups of human faces—two old and one young—that dominate the set. Contrasting sharply with the hot red carpet on which the couple restlessly pace back and forth and the emotional sparks ignited by their dynamic interaction, these powerful still photographs are static. They express the playwright's main theme of old age, which she forces her heroine and audience to accept; yet both Gina Rowlands as actress and John Cassavetes, in their double roles try to escape or transform the limits of this theme (both in style and content) through dynamic improvisation. This conflict is embodied in the dramatic punning on "stage." Rather than accept the rigid conventions of the traditional stage, or the definition of human life as a line drawn between fixed points that mark the boundaries between separate stages of development, Rowlands and Cassavetes stage a rebellion against such classifications by physically representing art and life as a constant stage of transformation and growth.

The polarity between youth and old age first comes to life as Gina and her seasoned collaborators leave the theater and are mobbed by young autograph hounds. Gina encounters an 18-year-old would-be actress, who reminds her of a younger version of herself. The girl's extreme ardor borders on neurosis and in fact leads to her accidental death. As the veterans of the theater are safely huddled together in a luxurious limousine, the desperate young fan is left out on the street in the rain, frantically clawing at the glass that separates her from her idol and twisting her flexible body into grotesque postures. We see Gina staring at the girl's blurred distorted image through the misted window as if she were looking at an old moving picture of herself. This powerful image simultaneously imprints Gina's consciousness and our own; again, we are forced into the same kind of schizoid split between viewer and actress that Gina experiences. When the young girl is struck down by a car a few moments later, Gina is the only one in the limousine who responds emotionally to the reality of what she has seen, insisting on stopping the car. In later sequences, she will make this experience the basis of a series of hallucinations, in which the girl represents her former self desperately struggling to stay alive. These psychotic episodes become her primary means of discovering an authentic way of playing the role of the aging heroine in *The Second Woman*. Although this sequence of events may represent a well-known interior approach to acting, the film never succeeds in convincing us that Gina's extreme psychic struggle is really essential or that it actually leads to the final improvisation where she spars—verbally, physically, and emotionally—with Cassavetes in order to give the play and its loser-heroine a dash of hope.

OPENING NIGHT: *Ben Gazzara, Gina Rowlands, and director John Cassavetes.*

In the seance sequence the playwright tries to exorcize the young girl's spirit, which she feels is disturbing the performance of her star. The seance is another form of theatrical performance or ritual that tries to externalize interior or non-physical experience. Apparently, Cassavetes is using this scene to express the playwright's means of dealing with her emotions and her medium. Not surprisingly, Gina flees from the seance just as she tries to escape from the play, despite her promise to accept a starring role in both. Gina is committed only to her fluid, intuitive sense of emotional authenticity, which is always focused on the present moment and which is supposedly the basis of her greatness as an actress. Although this all sounds fine in theory and despite the high quality of the acting performances, the causal connection between theory and practice within the film is not really convincing. This is especially true in the seance, which is precisely the point at which the film starts to be disappointing, for we sense the

action is highly contrived, not only by the playwright but also by Cassavetes the film-maker.

Opening Night is very ingenious and inventive in comparing the media of stage and screen and in playing with the multiple artistic and personal realities that they both draw upon. Where it goes astray is in developing Gina's descent into madness and alcoholism as a means of discovering an authentic way to reinterpret her theatrical role. Even if the film had succeeded in convincing us that this path was essential and that it actually led to the particular improvisation that follows, the weakness of that finale would still make us seriously question whether it was really worth all the *Sturm und Drang*. Gina's torment smacks more of gratuitous masochism, either pathetically chosen by the actress out of some misguided notion of the suffering artist or imposed on her by her tyrannical director—a mode of behavior that Gina Rowlands exhibits in every Cassavetes movie she makes.

Of course, they are both well aware of this pattern, which is the explicit subject of two improvisational scenes that are embarrassing to watch. In the first, Gina objects to a scene in the play where she is slapped by her co-star John (who is her former lover in her personal life within the film and of course her directorial husband in "real" life). When she complains that it is humiliating, her director allows her to slap both him and John (who double for each other on many levels) before subjecting her to repetitions of the scene, which are perhaps intended to desensitize both the actress and the audience to humiliation in the service of art. We have seen similar scenes in *Faces* and *Woman Under the Influence* where they were far better motivated both psychologically and aesthetically and where they consequently had far greater emotional power.

In the second scene, the drunken Gina staggers into the theater, knocking into walls and dragging herself along the floor while her director prevents the stagehand from helping her, as if cruelly imposing a punishment or foolishly using this physical humiliation to sober her up. The extreme exaggeration here makes both his motivation and her subsequent performance on stage totally unbelievable. The frank acknowledgment of Gina's masochism and her director's sadism within these two scenes explicitly identifies humiliation as the basic subject of the improvisations, yet it does not really lessen the gratuity or justify the pain.

I think my disappointment with *Opening Night* is intensified by the brilliance of the early sequences that open so many fascinating possibilities and by my extreme admiration for Cassavetes's earlier films. He is still one of the most talented, original directors who courageously succeeds in making personal films with great emotional resonance within or in spite of the Hollywood industry.

—MARSHA KINDER

LOOKING FOR MR. GOODBAR

Director: Richard Brooks. Script: Brooks, based on the novel by Judith Rossner. Photography: William Fraker. Producer: Freddie Fields.

In an age when formalism continues to reduce the politics of culture, specifically film, to questions of technique and style, it seems appropriate *not* to begin an analysis of Richard Brooks's *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* with a comparison of Judith Rossner's bestseller. *Goodbar* has its own center of gravity, reproduces its own images and norms, and it is on that basis that the film will be analyzed.

On the surface, *Goodbar* is about the life of a 28-year-old schoolteacher named Theresa Dunn who lives out the tragic/comic contradictions that beset her as she tries to live within the changing social morality of contemporary American society. By day, Terry is a warm, sensitive, dedicated teacher of deaf children. By night, she abandons her public conscience and cruises singles bars, indulging herself in a sex and horror fantasy that eventually leads to her being murdered by an ex-convict she'd picked up and taken home.

Goodbar is a perplexing and disturbing film that attempts to analyze the emergence of a new kind of alienation, one that extends Marx's nineteenth-century definition of alienation as simply the dehumanizing of labor. *Goodbar* explores a form of alienation which situates itself in the realm of culture and functions to extend the organization of the workplace to the realms of consumption and leisure as well. Thus the exploitation of labor is mediated by the manipulation of consciousness, a consciousness characterized by feelings of boredom and emptiness. It is the boredom and emptiness that *Goodbar* attempts to deal with. Yet

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Goodbar is perplexing because while it focuses on Theresa Dunn's personal odyssey through the detached and fragmented culture of the "new" morality and sexual freedom, the film never really comes to grips with any of the questions implied in its theme. More importantly, *Goodbar* is disturbing not only for what it does not say, but also because it ends up celebrating the kind of sexist, wooden morality that is, in part, responsible for the very issue it attempts to illuminate.

Director Richard Brooks claims he spoke to 600 women who frequent singles bars. Given the conclusion Brooks brings to the film one can't help but agonize over his petrified ideology. It is difficult to believe that Brooks could not have gleaned one glimmer of insight into the real forces that have shaped the lives of the women he interviewed, regardless of how battered their consciousnesses might have been. Consequently, at its best, *Goodbar* puts into murky relief the problematic of contemporary alienation, i.e., the confused, manipulated, and misdirected search for a "meaningful" life. At its worst, the film evokes a pernicious, paralytic morality that is incapable of either explaining or resolving the fundamental problems of contemporary alienation.

Ultimately, the potential of the film's organizing premise is short-circuited by exaggerated dichotomies which characterize the film from beginning to end. Practically every major character, scene, and theme is molded by Brooks in schizophrenic extremes, black and white caricatures. Instead of real-life characters we get a handful of near psychopaths; instead of an acknowledgment of concrete political and social forces we are treated to depthless psychology; instead of portraying confusion, rage, and powerlessness as fundamentally connected to the structure of modern capitalist society, Brooks leads us to believe that these are merely subjective, psychological aberrations; instead of historical analysis, we are served ahistorical amnesia, and so it goes.

Terry Dunn, the main character of the film, is first seen as a young college student whose sexual fantasies turn from the abstract to the concrete when she has an affair with her English professor. It is within the context of this affair that Brooks first presents his simplistic reduction of the complexity of sex, power, and love to an either/or issue. The professor is such a pompous, egocentric figure that he comes off less as a substantive character than as a lurking neurotic, sprung from the demented fears of a member of the John Birch Society. He is married, ejaculates too quickly, hates women, and tantalizes Terry with such verbal bombs as "I can't stand a woman's company after I've fucked her."

Needless to say, if Terry's future portends an attempt to assert her sexuality outside the parameters of love and marriage, Brooks lets us know right off that such behavior must be the result of a neurotic experience in her past. In this case cheap psychology hides Brooks's contempt for an emancipatory sexuality struggling to free itself from the institutionalized sexism of the past. And if Terry's affair with the professor seems unconvincing, Brooks takes up the slack by filling the remainder of the film with a melange of misfits whose lives seem peculiarly disconnected from the socioeconomic system that nourishes them; thus psychology reigns supreme. With the exception of Terry, all of Brooks's characters are portrayed in an ahistorical, insular "here and now" milieu, divorced from social struggles, social justice, and any sense of continuity with earlier generations.

For instance, once Terry leaves home and moves to the city, she encounters an unbroken series of men whose most distinguishing trait is their sexism and their propensity for psychotic violence. Collectively these men strongly reveal Brooks's unconvincing use of overkill to bring his message home. Each of the men in Terry's life appear neurotic enough to have been her murderer. Thus Brooks avoids illuminating the social basis of sexism as well as Terry's self-destruction in order to reinforce instead the simplistic, puritanical notion that indiscriminate sex leads to death. Tony, the singles-bar hood, who is Terry's first lover after the professor, is weakly portrayed as a souped-up Scorsesian maniac. Tony wields fear and dangerous sex as he titillates Terry into fits of self-incriminating laughter and unconvincing orgasmic heights. Brooks' working-class characters, like Scorsese's (specifically Tony and the Arnold Schwarzenegger-look-alike who kills Terry in the end), are expressions of a truncated portrayal that views them as neurotic, explosive psychopaths, waging a war against the refined sensibilities of decent middle-class America. Thus,

social, political, and economic forces are buried beneath the scapegoating fears of a politically reactionary view of the world.

Brooks outdoes his own pseudo-Freudian psychologizing by having Terry wooed by a sexually incompetent, overly hygenic, ex-seminarian social worker. Terry despises the social worker because he resembles too closely her own father, who is given to pontificating about the virtues of Notre Dame, the family, and the strengths of Irish-Catholic morality. It is within the context of Terry's authoritarian, Irish-Catholic family that Brooks provides a basis for the unfolding of the "new" puritanism. However, his depthless psychology ends up celebrating an illusory freedom, i.e., the choice between "healthy" Catholic repression or spiritual/physical death. Moreover, the psychological basis for Brooks's "new" puritanism seems to have been invented in a psychoanalytic institute in which all social and political problems are reduced to the personal and privatized realm of existence. Consequently, Brooks's celebration of the subjective does nothing to provide the kind of rich, complex interplay of subjective and objective forces that could have meaningfully shaped his characters' lives.

Terry's sister fits well into Brooks's morality tale. She is portrayed as a mindless woman whose life is an endless series of disconnected relationships filled with drugs, porno-films, and swinger-style sex; she represents the underside of Brooks's wooden morality coin. The older sister operates in the same world of sexual morality that Terry inhabits, but she moves in a much more familiar scene. Instead of the disco-bar scene, the sister wields her sexual freedom within the broken-down boundaries of monogomous relationships. Her reward for sexual promiscuity is spiritual rather than physical death. The sister stands as a warning to all women that at best impersonal sex results in psychic and moral atrophy. For Brooks it is the extremes that tell the story: repression or death. Consequently, the themes and messages in *Goodbar* reveal themselves statically rather than dialectically.

The static unfolding of *Goodbar* is further represented by an endless montage of flashbacks and fantasy sequences; as Terry travels through Brooks's stylized world of wet-dream porno and disco clubs, the film stretches credibility into farce. Keaton is simply too innocent-looking, too sweet, to protray convincingly the energized desperation and drive that her character suggests. She smiles as men grab her ass; laughs as a petty hoodlum attempts to steal money from a pocketbook at the bar; oozes sugar and honey as her professor makes love to her incompetently in their initial sexual encounter. There is just too little conflict, pain, and struggle in Keaton's role as Terry Dunn. Terry's eventual death, especially her cry for release as she is being stabbed by a psychotic gay, has no substantive, generic validity; the scene is too disconnected from a deeper concrete and abrasive reality. Terry's murder ends up as a cheap piece of sensationalism, one that substitutes drama for analysis. Thus, political and social insight get buried beneath the Hollywood formula of sex and violence.

Not surprisingly, there is nothing sensuous or erotic about *Goodbar*. The boring/neurotic dispositions of the film's characters coupled with Keaton's charming but inappropriate innocence result in sexual scenes which come off like high-gloss, soft-core porn films made for distribution at fashionable country clubs.

In the final analysis, *Goodbar* represents an unsuccessful attempt to examine the nature of contemporary alienation as well as the channeling of the independent sexuality of women into the dead-end anonymity of the singles bars. What Brooks finally gives us is a film which reduces the complexity of important issues to a morality play that stays clear of the real antagonisms and contradictions that shape his characters' lives.

Brooks's "new" puritanism is the ideology of conformism parading in the garb of self-righteousness. Thus histrionics replace logic; and the alienation that fuels modern industrial societies is abstracted from the concrete political and social forces that give it meaning. Hidden behind the glamour of the film's radical facade are what seems to be an endless number of sexist, stunted, scapegoating stereotypes. Brooks refuses to portray women, men, gays, and working-class people dialectically with their strengths and flaws illuminated against the historical and social forces of the times. Instead, he serves us nothing more than flat, one-dimensional caricatures, fundamentally reactionary and unoriginal.

—HENRY A. GIROUX

Another Giant Film Book Round-Up

REVIEWS AND LISTINGS

Three books on FILM AND SOCIETY

Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Social History of American Movies*. New York: Random House, 1975. $12.95.

Garth Jowett (for the American Film Institute), *Film: The Democratic Art*. Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown, 1976. $19.95.

Tino Balio, ed., *The American Film Industry*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976. $6.95.

"Movie buffs," writes David Gordon in the Tino Balio anthology, "tend to be as ignorant about the movie industry as they are knowledgeable about its product." Each of these books about the American movie industry has its own way of attempting to redress this imbalance; and because each largely succeeds, in its own way, the three books are complementary. It is profitable to consider them together not simply because they overlap but also because of the questions they raise (and leave unresolved.)

Sklar's *Movie-Made America*—the title is more alliterative than descriptive of the book's content—has an immediate edge over the other two. It is more accessible, more readable, more attractive (and more attractively produced) than they are, and it is certain to be more widely read. Balio's *The American Film Industry* is designed as "a collateral text for undergraduate courses dealing with the development of the American Film." Concentrating as it does on the business history of the American movies, Balio's book at first glance seems more pointed than Sklar's "social history of the American movies," but in reality it is more diffuse. It suffers by comparison with Sklar's book largely because of its format—that of a series of essays strung together in chronological order by Balio's brief prefatory remarks. Sklar's strength is that he is unafraid to speak with his own voice, a voice that is forceful enough to give unity to the themes he discusses. *Movie-Made America* is quite possibly the best introduction to its subject; Sklar's attempt to reach the interested general reader deserves to succeed—particularly in paperback form—not least because of his steadfast denial of commodity-fetishism, his well-judged determination to treat films *not* as the "products" of an "industry" but as artefacts embodying real social meaning.

Garth Jowett's *Film: The Democratic Art* is by comparison a much less "democratic" book. He insists—against Sklar, in effect—that "a social history of movie-going" can be written "without analysing the product on the screen." Apparently nobody at the American Film Institute, under whose aegis the book appears, saw fit to disagree. Jowett deals with "movie-going" and "the movie industry" by indirection. *Film: The Democratic Art* is really about these phenomena as they have been interpreted and evaluated by successive waves of observers—by concerned (and often remarkably self-righteous) sociologists, mass psychologists, and by what an instructive article from *Fortune* magazine (reprinted by Balio) lists as "women's clubs, church organizations, patriotic societies, youth movements, and assorted uplift and reform bodies." At this point, Jowett and Sklar come together; for Sklar's *Movie-Made America* concerns itself, *inter alia*, with the way in which these predominantly WASP groups, in their capacity as self-appointed guardians of the evanescent cultural *status quo*, came to perceive a redoubled threat from the film industry once control of it passed out of the hands of men with names like Edison, Porter, and Griffith into the hands of men with names like Laemmle, Zukor, Cohn, Goldwyn, Loew, Thalberg, Zanuck, and Selznick. That these were the second-generation entrepreneurs who introduced, maintained, and defended the Hollywood studio system adds force

to Sklar's argument that the contents and control of the movies ("the first of the modern mass media," "the most popular and influential medium of culture in the United States") help to shape the character and direction of American culture as a whole. This argument is—again in effect—backed up and fleshed out in some (considerable) detail by Jowett. *Film: The Democratic Art,* which is by far the most scholarly and academic of the three books under consideration, has much less of an argument to present than has *Movie-Made America.* Jowett, unlike Sklar, lets his prodigious research, his meticulously amassed surveys, data, and tables speak for him and through him.

All three of these books cover much the same ground. They deal with the technical inventions that made cinema possible; with Edison; with the nickelodeon; with the Motion Picture Patents Company ("the trust"); with the star system, the talkies, the impact of Prohibition and the Depression. They cover the structure of "the industry," the relationship of production, distribution, and exhibition; they discuss the Hays Office and other attempts to control the content of films. They occupy themselves with relations between the industry and the government (successive anti-trust suits, the Paramount decision), with HUAC and the blacklist, with television. All these are dealt with in sequence by these three books, but from quite different angles. The emphasis of the Balio compendium is on the *business* of producing and showing films (it includes not only articles from *Fortune* but also a prospectus prepared by the investment house of Halsey, Stuart and Co. to attract investors to movie firms, which speaks volumes). Jowett's emphasis is on reactions to this business, not so much by audiences but by those observing audiences—his book should become a standard reference on such topics as the history of censorship. Sklar is different from both. Because he deals with "the role that movies have played in American life," he can confront and cover the actual *content* of the films, the "product," he is discussing. Unlike the others, Sklar can place silent comedies, Disney, Capra, screwball, *film noir,* etc. *within* his argument; what films are about, in one sense, is not pushed aside for the sake of a "better" understanding of what films are about in another sense.

This said, these three volumes remain mutually supportive rather than antagonistic. Even their faults—most notably, a tendency to dwell on cinematic archeology and prehistory, apparently at the expense of post-World War II developments, which uniformly get comparatively short shrift—are faults the three share. Most importantly, the fact that all three books raise more issues than any one of them can resolve leaves readers with a task. All of them raise a point given most prominence in Jeanne Thomas Allen's contribution to *The American Film Industry:* the existence of arch-monopolistic tendencies within the industry *throughout* its history, back through Edison and beyond. Someone—a good Marxist, perhaps—should set about indicating what the movies as a business tell us about the actual mechanisms, as well as the myths, of a monopoly capitalism that in America was the home of the movies from the very beginning.

—PAUL THOMAS

ZAVATTINI
Sequences from a Cinematic Life

By Cesare Zavattini, tr. by William Weaver. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970.

This volume (drawn from Zavattini's lifelong notebooks) was almost unnoticed upon its appearance, which is unfortunate. Just as one screenwriter—Carl Mayer—provided the fundamental artistic impulse (and a surprising number of key scripts) for the great cinematic wave of German Expressionism, so Zavattini gave the central energy to Italian Neorealism. Moreover, in an industry where the dance is usually to the hustle or the jerk, Zavattini's life offers another and precious kind of role-model: he was a radical, a man of culture, an original thinker, an influential creative force in theater and literature—and an interesting painter besides.

In re-reading this neglected book, thus, we may easily come to owe him something broader than his specific contributions to neorealism. Zavattini was a writer in the peculiarly ambiguous sense that term carries among the people whose written

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And so, reading his notebooks, it seems natural that such a man, who knew his own life as a fascinating, unending serial, would theorize that it would be quite enough if cinema could only catch the national everyday life in its superb everydayness: drama enough for everybody, on every corner! He saw that welter of events illuminated by constant little moral lightning flashes. What they revealed, as transmuted into *Shoeshine*, or *Bicycle Thief*, or *Umberto D.*, or *Miracle in Milan*, could be terrible or tragic or full of pathos, unsalvable and unredeemable. But through Zavattini and De Sica ran some kind of indefatigable energy they managed to tap and mobilize on the screen. This book is fascinating not because it documents Zavattini's creative processes—it barely mentions his great cinematic achievements—but because his life was itself almost literally cinematic. —ERNEST CALLENBACH

STAR ACTING

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In serious film literature, acting is generally written of in vague generalities, and treated as distinctly subsidiary to the over-arching craft of the *auteur*, scriptwriter, and other creative collaborators. This original and intriguing book uses numerous frame enlargements to deal with the process of acting in the same detail as other critics have dealt with *mise-en-scène*. It attempts, and successfully, to convey something of what an actress's technique consists of—how it is managed in different parts of scenes, how it reaches heights of emotional exposure and power, how it fits in with the director's organization of the frame and the scene. Most of the analysis deals with peak moments, as is natural enough. But the text also surveys each actress's evolution, and despite occasional mushy fan passages, is probably the most important book on its topic since Pudovkin. Nicely printed, despite the inevitably fuzzy quality of the frame enlargements. —E.C.

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"Film buffism" crops up in some strange information included in entries on people and films. For example, André Bazin's film theory is described as "lacking rigour" and "imbued with pseudo-mystical vocabulary" while his influence on the New Wave is only mentioned in passing. Jeanne Moreau's success is attributed in part to "her mature eroticism" and "sultry downturned mouth"; the strength of her acting ability runs a slow second. This sort of cute writing threatens to reduce the entire undertaking to amateur status.

Fortunately, in spite of these faults, the factual information included in *The Oxford Companion* has been found through use to be more reliable than other available sources in English such as the various editions of Halliwell's *Filmgoer's Companion* and also more useful than other recent encyclopedic efforts such as the *International* and *World Encyclopedia.* It contains information hard to find elsewhere—on major archives, film periodicals (whose histories and milieux are extremely difficult to trace), and good biographies of studios and production companies.

The *Oxford's* most interesting and innovative feature, as well as surely the most useful to the amateur film user, is its subject entries. By first providing each subject with a definition in the vocabulary of film, it provides an immediate grasp of how the term is used in the field. "Cinematography," for example, begins "the technological process of photography applied to moving images." The entries go on to examine the background or development of the subject in a clear, concise, meaningful (and not cute) way. By comparison the *International Encyclopedia* leaps right into a discussion of multiscreen and three-dimensional techniques leaving the reader completely lost (and muddled by the totally chopped up text with an incredible number of unrelated illustrations). Another example is *"cinéma-vérité,"* under which both the multiple meanings and the vagueness of the term are duly noted. The editors have made a sincere and generally successful attempt to contribute to a clarification of the field along with the creation of a reference tool. This is the mark of a truly good encyclopedia.

The Oxford Companion to Film is useful, inventive, easy to read, well thought out and generally informative. Its faults are few, it accomplishes nearly all its attempts, and it breaks some interesting new ground. More reference materials in this spirit will greatly contribute to film scholarship. —LINDA PROVINZANO

BFI PAMPHLET SERIES

The British Film Institute has begun publishing a series of small (70-100 pages) booklets in paper covers. The series thus provides what has been needed for a long time—a means of issuing studies too long for article publication but too short to constitute normal books, or too specialized to sustain themselves in the ever more crowded film book market. Some of the titles have been published in conjunction with BFI exhibitions. Except as otherwise noted, they cost 75 pence from the BFI, and are available in the US through New York Zoetrope, 31 East 12th Street, New York 10003 at $2.80. No illustrations.

Chanan, Michael, ed. *Chilean Cinema.* The historical background, plus interviews and documents.

Dyer, Richard, ed. *Gays and Film.* Essays on lesbians and film, stereotyping, and camp.

Molina-Foix, Vicente. *New Cinema in Spain.* 55 p. A survey from the Civil War onward, with a dictionary of film-makers.

Nash, Mark. *Dreyer.* Essay plus filmography.

Rosenbaum, Jonathan, ed. *Rivette: Texts and Interviews.* The texts go back to *Cahiers,* 1955; the interviews bear on *L'Amour fou* and *Out 1.* Biofilmography and bibliography.

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Atwell, Lee, *G.W. Pabst.* Boston: G.K. Hall, 1977. $8.95. An exhaustive and authoritative study of Pabst's work and life; the only full-scale treatment of this important director available in English.

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sion of the editors to include people peripheral to the field such as the Beatles and others instead of film people like Woody Allen, Mel Brooks, or Robert Cummings (just to mention American omissions) is somewhat suspect. More serious, however, to my mind, is the lack of filmographies. Filmographies are not easy to locate in any one source and an encyclopedia seems the logical place for them. Also distressing is the rounding off of running times for film entries, which will not only create much confusion but conceals differences between European and American release prints.

"Film buffism" crops up in some strange information included in entries on people and films. For example, André Bazin's film theory is described as "lacking rigour" and "imbued with pseudo-mystical vocabulary" while his influence on the New Wave is only mentioned in passing. Jeanne Moreau's success is attributed in part to "her mature eroticism" and "sultry downturned mouth"; the strength of her acting ability runs a slow second. This sort of cute writing threatens to reduce the entire undertaking to amateur status.

Fortunately, in spite of these faults, the factual information included in *The Oxford Companion* has been found through use to be more reliable than other available sources in English such as the various editions of Halliwell's *Filmgoer's Companion* and also more useful than other recent encyclopedic efforts such as the *International* and *World Encyclopedia.* It contains information hard to find elsewhere—on major archives, film periodicals (whose histories and milieux are extremely difficult to trace), and good biographies of studios and production companies.

The *Oxford's* most interesting and innovative feature, as well as surely the most useful to the amateur film user, is its subject entries. By first providing each subject with a definition in the vocabulary of film, it provides an immediate grasp of how the term is used in the field. "Cinematography," for example, begins "the technological process of photography applied to moving images." The entries go on to examine the background or development of the subject in a clear, concise, meaningful (and not cute) way. By comparison the *International Encyclopedia* leaps right into a discussion of multiscreen and three-dimensional techniques leaving the reader completely lost (and muddled by the totally chopped up text with an incredible number of unrelated illustrations). Another example is *"cinéma-vérité,"* under which both the multiple meanings and the vagueness of the term are duly noted. The editors have made a sincere and generally successful attempt to contribute to a clarification of the field along with the creation of a reference tool. This is the mark of a truly good encyclopedia.

The Oxford Companion to Film is useful, inventive, easy to read, well thought out and generally informative. Its faults are few, it accomplishes nearly all its attempts, and it breaks some interesting new ground. More reference materials in this spirit will greatly contribute to film scholarship. —LINDA PROVINZANO

BFI PAMPHLET SERIES

The British Film Institute has begun publishing a series of small (70-100 pages) booklets in paper covers. The series thus provides what has been needed for a long time—a means of issuing studies too long for article publication but too short to constitute normal books, or too specialized to sustain themselves in the ever more crowded film book market. Some of the titles have been published in conjunction with BFI exhibitions. Except as otherwise noted, they cost 75 pence from the BFI, and are available in the US through New York Zoetrope, 31 East 12th Street, New York 10003 at $2.80. No illustrations.

Chanan, Michael, ed. *Chilean Cinema.* The historical background, plus interviews and documents.

Dyer, Richard, ed. *Gays and Film.* Essays on lesbians and film, stereotyping, and camp.

Molina-Foix, Vicente. *New Cinema in Spain.* 55 p. A survey from the Civil War onward, with a dictionary of film-makers.

Nash, Mark. *Dreyer.* Essay plus filmography.

Rosenbaum, Jonathan, ed. *Rivette: Texts and Interviews.* The texts go back to *Cahiers,* 1955; the interviews bear on *L'Amour fou* and *Out 1.* Biofilmography and bibliography.

LISTINGS

The following listings provide information, and in some cases evaluations, of most but not all of the film books that have appeared since our last round-up (*FQ,* Summer 1977). Unless otherwise signed, annotations are by Ernest Callenbach.

Atkins, Thomas R., ed. *Science Fiction Films.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976. $2.95. Includes brief interview with Siegel on *Invasion of the Body Snatchers.*

Atwell, Lee, *G.W. Pabst.* Boston: G.K. Hall, 1977. $8.95. An exhaustive and authoritative study of Pabst's work and life; the only full-scale treatment of this important director available in English.

Aumont, Jean-Pierre. *Sun and Shadow: An Autobiography.* New York: Norton, 1977. $.9.95.

Bachmann, Gideon. *Bewegte Bilder: Macht und Handwerk des Films.* Weinheim und Basel: Beltz, 1978. This compact volume is partly a description of the film-making process (and industry) and partly a meditation upon the social role of the film—its potential and its limitations. With some glances at various national cinemas and at the future of the medium.

Barnouw, Erik. *The Sponsor: Notes on a Modern Potentate.* New York: Oxford, 1978. $10.00 cloth. How the corporate sponsorship system gradually gained control of the supposedly public airwaves, perfected its ideological control of programming to the point where actual conflict is rarely seen, slopped over into publicly financed broadcasting, and arrived at a system where nothing going out over the airwaves (including many wonderful movies, of course) is free of commercial interference of one type of another. (Perhaps out of self-defense, people at last seem to be watching it less.)

Barsam, Richard Meran. *In The Dark: A Primer for the Movies.* New York: Viking, 1977. $10.00. An introduction apparently intended for high-school students: little glimpses of film history, production, criticism.

Bauer, Barbara. *Bing Crosby.* New York: Pyramid, 1977. $1.95.

Beaver, James N., Jr. *John Garfield: His Life and Films.* Cranbury, NJ: A. S. Barnes, 1978. $17.50.

Bergman, Ingmar. *The Serpent's Egg.* New York: Pantheon, 1977. $7.95 cloth.

Bland, Alexander. *The Nureyev* Valentino. New York: Dell, 1977. $6.95.

Bodeen, DeWitt. *More From Hollywood: The Careers of 15 Great American Stars.* Cranbury, NJ: A.S. Barnes, 1977. $15.00. Revised versions of *Films in Review* career articles.

Bogarde, Dirk. *A Postillion Struck by Lightning: A Memoir.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977. $8.95.

Bohn, Thomas W., and Richard L. Stromgren, with Daniel H. Johnson. *Light and Shadows: A History of Motion Pictures.* Port Washington, NY: Alfred Publishing Co., 1975. No price given. A general history, intended for text use; includes brief sections on non-theatrical developments.

Bohnenkamp, Dennis R. and Sam L. Grogg, Jr., eds. *The American Film Institute Guide to College Courses in Film and Television.* Princeton, NJ 08540: Peterson's Guides, P.O. Box 2123. $9.75. Four thousand people are now teaching film courses of one kind or another; degree programs exist in 307 schools. Listings give summary information organized by state and institution.

Bondanella, Peter, ed. *Federico Fellini: Essays in Criticism.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1978. $4.95. An international collection of essays.

Braasch, Minta. *Dear Hollywood: I Think I Love You.* (1146 Via Los Trancos, San Lorenzo, CA. 94580, $3.95) Endearing ramblings of a die-hard fan.

Braudy, Leo, and Morris Dickstein, eds. *Great Film Directors: A Critical Anthology.* New York: Oxford, 1978. No price given. An excellent and broad-ranging collection of essays on 23 major directors.

Broughton, James. *Seeing the Light.* San Francisco: City Lights, 1977. $2.50. Aphorisms, epigrams, proverbs, poetry, and good homey advice from the independent film's eldest angel. A funny, wise, and shock-producing book.

Bruccoli, Matthew J., ed. *F. Scott Fitzgerald's Screenplay for* Three Comrades, *by Erich Maria Remarque.* Carbondale: So. Illinois University Press, 1978. $10.00. Fitzgerald's version, not the script as shot.

———. *"The Last of the Novelists": F. Scott Fitzgerald and The Last Tycoon.* Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977. $9.85.

Carey, Gary. *Doug and Mary.* New York: Dutton, 1978. $8.95. A nicely written account of the relationship between the two early Hollywood luminaries.

Chaneles, Sol. *Collecting Movie Memorabilia.* New York: Arco Publishing, 1978. $10.00.

Chaplin, Charles. *My Life in Pictures.* New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1974; now reissued in paperback, $7.95. A sumptuously designed picture book.

Chevassu, François. *L'expression Cinématographique: Les Eléments du Film et Leurs Fonctions.* Paris: Pierre Lherminier, 1977. 39F.

Collection Cinéma Permanent. The former series "Cinéma d'Aujourd'hui," edited by Pierre Lherminier, has now been reborn Phoenix-like under the above label, and in a slightly larger but similar format: critical essays accompanied by illustrations, filmographies, and bibliographies. Volumes on Bogart, Buñuel, Visconti, Forman, and others are scheduled.

Collet, Jean. *Le Cinéma de François Truffaut.* Paris: Pierre Lherminier, 1977. 48F.

Cowie, Peter. *Eighty Years of Cinema.* Cranbury, NJ: A. S. Barnes, 1978. $17.50. An extension of Cowie's history through 1974.

———. *Film in Sweden: The New Directors.* Cranbury, NJ: A. S. Barnes, 1978. $6.95. Also *Film in Sweden: Stars and Players.* $7.95. Printed in a format reminiscent of the Movie Paperbacks, these compact, information-packed volumes are the first in a series on Swedish cinema.

———, ed. *Hollywood 1920–1970.* Cranbury, NJ: A. S. Barnes, 1978. $25.00. A large-format reprint and extension of the "Hollywood in the . . ." series; to the original twenties (David Robinson), thirties (John Baxter) and forties (Charles Higham and Joel Greenberg) Cowie has now added the fifties (Gordon Gow) and sixties (John Baxter). An enormous amount of useful material in one set of covers.

———, ed. *International Film Guide 1978.* South Brunswick, N.J.: A.S. Barnes, 1977. $6.95 paper. It was not the best of years for world cinema, but the indefatigable IFG reports on the stirrings from all over that may come to something remarkable when the present lull ends. As usual, this issue is chockfull of useful information for any film fan.

———, ed. *World Filmography 1967 and 1968.* Cranbury, NJ: A. S. Barnes, 1977. $35.00 each vol. Credits for a vast number of films, plus one-line synopses in many cases.

Cripps, Thomas. *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900–1942.* New York: Oxford, 1977. $19.95. A history largely from original sources.

Davis, Douglas. *Artculture: Essays on the Post-Modern.* New York: Harper & Row, 1977. $10.00.

Dick, Bernard F. *Anatomy of Film.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978. $10.00.

DiFranco, J. Philip, ed. *The Beatles in Richard Lester's* A Hard Day's Night. New York: Penguin, 1978. $6.95. A complete shot-by-shot reconstruction of the film, prefaced by a loopy interview in which Lester and DiFranco go through the whole film, fitfully recapturing the madness and energy of its production. By now, the sweet and witty wholesomeness of the Beatles seems as incredible as the horror with which the Establishment greeted their unprecedented popularity. (Lester prefers *Help!*)

Druxman, Michael B. *Make It Again, Sam: A Survey of Movie Remakes.* Cranbury, NJ: A.S. Barnes, 1975. $15.00. The remake history of about thirty projects, running the gamut from *Macbeth* to *The Mummy,* plus a listing of titles of multiple films made from literary works.

Edmonds, I.G. *Big U: Universal in the Silent Days.* Cranbury, NJ: A.S. Barnes, 1977. $15.00.

Eizykman, Claudine. *La Jouissance-Cinéma.* Paris: Union Générale d'Editions (10/18), 1976. No price given.

Ellis, John. *Screen Reader: Cinema/Ideology/Politics.* London: The Society for Education in Film and Television, 1977 (available through New York Zoetrope, 31 E. 12th St., New York, N.Y. 10003). $6.90 paper.

Evans, Arthur B. *Jean Cocteau and His Films of Orphic Identity.* Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1977. $12.00.

Fielding, Raymond. *The March of Time, 1935–1951.* New York: Oxford, 1978. $14.95. This meticulously researched work must contain everything that is now humanly possible to discover about the *March of Time* newsfilm series. Fielding has produced a surprisingly readable, indeed fascinating, story—from the radio beginnings, with portraits of Louis de Rochemont and the other persons involved, analyses of many of the actual films, and historical sidelights on the times.

Feinstein, Peter, ed. *The Independent Film Community: A Report on the Status of Independent Film in the United States.* Committee on Film and Television Resources and Services, 1977 (available from Anthology Film Archives, 80 Wooster St., New York, N.Y., 10012).

French, Philip. *Westerns.* New York: Oxford, 1978. $5.95. (Cinema One series)

Gaffney, Maureen. *More Films Kids Like: A Catalog of Short Films for Children.* Chicago: American Library Association, 1977. $8.95 paper.

Georgakas, Dan. *Left Face: A Source Book of Radical Magazines, Presses, and Collectives Actively Involved in the Arts.* New York: *Cineaste,* 333 Sixth Avenue (10014), 1978. $1.50.

Giannetti, Louis D. *Godard and Others: Essays on Film Form.* Cranbury, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 1976. $10.00. Four intelligent essays—on Godard, the mobile camera, "metaphors," and "plotlessness."

Gidal, Peter, ed. *Structural Film Anthology.* London: British Film Institute, 1976, reprinted 1978. One of the more visible movements in contemporary avant-garde film-making has been the work of the British cine-structuralists. Systemic, procedural and steadfastly ascetic, their explorations of the relationships between imagism and the production of the film itself are often obsessive in their pursuits of conceptual purity. Gidal's introductory essay, "Theory and Definition of Structuralist/Materialist Film" is a revelatory manifesto against bourgeois illusionism. ". . . one must beware not to let the construct, the shape, take the place of the 'story' in narrative film. Then one would merely be substituting one hierarchy for another within the

same system, a formalism for what is traditionally called content." The collection of articles, notes and interviews presents a fair overview of available writings on "structuralist/materialist" film. British artists are represented such as Malcolm LeGrice, William Raban and Mike Leggett, balanced with Europeans Kurt Kren, Birgit and Wilhelm Hein and with North Americans Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton, Paul Sharits, and others. —TONY REVEAUX

Gould, Michael, *Surrealism and the Cinema*. Cranbury, NJ: A.S. Barnes, 1976. $9.95.

Grant, Barry K., ed. *Film Genre: Theory and Criticism*. Metuchen, N.J., Scarecrow, 1977. $10.00 cloth. An anthology of articles by McConnell, Tudor, Durgnat, and others.

Hayward, Stan. *Scriptwriting for Animation*. New York: Hastings House, 1977. $8.95 paper.

Herndon, Booton. *Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks*. New York: Norton, 1978. $9.95. Narcissism, alcoholism, and other difficulties that lay behind the facade of "the most popular couple [!] the world has known."

Higham, Charles. *Marlene: The Life of Marlene Dietrich*. New York: Norton, 1977. $9.95. Considerably more astute than the usual Hollywood anecdotal biography, Higham's treatment of the glamorous Marlene makes her extremely human (and von Sternberg extremely inhuman).

Holloway, Ronald. *Beyond the Image: Approaches to the Religious Dimension in the Cinema*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1977. $4.95.

Jacobs, Diane. *Hollywood Renaissance*. Cranbury, NJ: A. S. Barnes, 1977. $12.00. An intelligent yet somehow persistently erratic attempt to come to terms with the American films of the past decade. Jacobs *likes* the films, on the whole, but she sees them through a pop-sociology screen that tends to distort her view of them. She has swallowed the journalistic notion that the seventies are altogether different from the sixties, and thus can write that at the time of *Nashville* "Establishment figures are acknowledged as viable authority by most Americans"—this at a point when American public opinion about businessmen, politicians, scientists, doctors, and pretty much everybody who represents "authority" has sunk to the lowest recorded level in history. Jacobs's analysis of the films mainly centers on plot-and-character, with a few fillips of visual comment. Her perceptions of the psychological ramifications of this level, however, are generally mundane, sometimes outrageously so, as in her discussion of *Woman Under the Influence*.

Jarvie, I.C. *Window on Hong Kong: A Sociological Study of the Hong Kong Film Industry and Its Audience*. Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, Center of Asian Studies, 1977. No price given.

Johnson, Robert K. *Francis Ford Coppola*. Boston: G.K. Hall, $8.50.

Jones, Karen, ed. *International Index to Film Periodicals. 1974:* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975. $27.50.

Jorgens, Jack J. *Shakespeare on Film*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977. $15.00.

Kirby, Jack Temple. *Media-Made Dixie*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978. $9.95. How historians, novelists, and movies have constructed images of the South.

Kawin, Bruce F. *Faulkner and Film*. New York: Ungar, 1977. $10.00 cloth, $3.95 paper. An unusually intelligent and sophisticated study of the intricate relationships between fiction and film in the life and work of one of our greatest novelists. Kawin tells the story with meticulous attention to detail, and concludes with a daring but reasonable assessment of Faulkner's direct and indirect influences on *Kane*, Resnais, Robbe-Grillet, and Godard.

Kobal, John, ed. *Movie-Star Portraits of the Forties*. New York: Dover, 1977. $6.00. 163 glamor photos.

Kobler, John. *Damned in Paradise: The Life of John Barrymore*. New York: Atheneum, 1977. Four pages outlining the mystic practices of Barrymore's business manager's wife, but none of Barymore's film performances merit more than a few sentences. This is regrettable, since Barrymore was an extraordinary link between nineteenth- and twentieth-century acting styles. —JOSEPH GARTON

Kostelanetz, Richard, ed. *Esthetics Contemporary*. Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1978. $19.95 cloth; $9.95 paper. Essays by philosophers and practitioners on issues in contemporary art.

Koszarski, Richard, ed. *Hollywood Directors 1941–1976*. New York: Oxford, 1978. $15.00; $4.95 paper. A sequel to Koszarski's earlier collection of pieces by directors in the 1914–1940 period, this volume brings together a great number of brief, amusing and often insightful articles.

Kreidl, John Francis. *Nicholas Ray*. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1978. $8.95.

Krueger, Miles. *Showboat: The Story of a Classic American Musical*. New York: Oxford, 1977. $25.00.

Lambrey, Maureen. *The American Film Directors*. New York: Collier Books, 1977. $9.95. Photo portraits

of 82 directors. Many of them are very funny; my favorite is John Huston in a long robe and with a distinct halo.

Lee, Robert and Robert Misiorowski. *Script Models: A Handbook for the Media Writer.* New York: Hastings House, 1978. $8.95 cloth, $4.50 paper.

Leese, Elizabeth. *Costume Design in the Movies.* New York: Ungar, 1977. $17.50. A dictionary of designers. Mostly photographic illustrations, but a few sketches.

Lindemann, Bernhard. *Experimentalfilm als Metafilm.* Hildesheim and New York: George Olms Verlag, 1977. DM 48. In this volume 7 of the "Studia Semiotica" series, Lindemann bears down on ten experimental films: *Un Chien Andalou, Entr'acte, Ballet Mécanique* and contemporary works by Snow, Lawder, Frampton, and Emshwiller. Favoring the approaches of Metz and Eco, he dissects their continuities with frame enlargements and fully referenced critiques. Many of the descriptions and quotes are in English, and the well-informed bibliography is useful in itself.

—TONY REVEAUX

London, Mel. *Getting into Film.* New York: Ballantine, 1978. $6.95. A highly readable, down-to-earth introduction to film-making as an occupation. Lots of chastening information on television film, advertising film, sponsored film, training film, news film: who does it and how to get into it—film as an industry. Recommended for anyone contemplating going to film school.

Maddock, Brent. *The Films of Jacques Tati.* Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1978. $7.00. Descriptions of the films, followed by chapters on various aspects of Tati's work.

Maltin, Leonard and Richard W. Bann. *Our Gang: The Life and Times of The Little Rascals.* New York: Crown, 1977. $12.95. Credits and synopses.

Mander, Jerry. *Four Arguments for the Abolition of Television.* New York: Morrow, 1978. $4.95. A quite unnerving case against the medium not for its contents but for its technology, aesthetics, politics, and possible dangers to your health.

Mehr, Linda, ed. *Motion Pictures, Television and Radio: A Union Catalogue of Manuscript and Special Collections in the Western United States.* Boston: G.K. Hall, 1977. $27.00 cloth.

Mellen, Joan. *Big Bad Wolves: Masculinity in the American Film.* New York: Pantheon, 1978. $12.95. The sorry devolution of the American screen male, until "by the seventies the social emasculation of men is taken for granted. Sex that would be accompanied by an emotional commitment to a woman now seems frightening because were a man to lose control of the sexual side of his life, he would be left with no power at all."

Meyers, Richard. *Movies on Movies: How Hollywood Sees Itself.* New York: Drake Publishers, 1978. $5.95.

Mintz, Marilyn D. *The Martial Arts Films.* Cranbury, NJ: A. S. Barnes, 1978. $9.95.

Monaco, James, *et al. Celebrity: The Media as Image Makers.* New York: Delta, 1978. $4.95 paper. Essays by various hands, including Monaco's own, on the techniques, problems, and costs of celebrity. On the whole, reading about it sounds like more fun than doing it, especially since New York seems to be the center and sink of the whole business. The last best word is John Leonard's: "There are too many celebrities and not enough sycophants."

Naremore, James. *The Magic World of Orson Welles.* New York: Oxford, 1978. $15.95. An intelligent analysis of the Welles *oeuvre,* and some material on Welles's political columns and broadcasts.

Noguez, Dominique. *La Cinéma, Autrement.* Paris: Union Général d'Editions (10/18), 1977. No price given.

Parish, James Robert (with Mart Trost). *Actors' Television Credits. Supplement I.* Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1978. $16.00. Covers 1973–76.

Parish, James Robert and Pitts, Michael R. *The Great Science Fiction Pictures.* Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1977. This compact and readable volume includes not only full credits for the great (and not so great) science fiction features, but provides reliable and generally trustworthy criticisms. —TONY REVEAUX

Peary, Gerald and Roger Shatzkin, eds. *The Classic American Novel and the Movies.* New York: Ungar, 1977. $12.50 cloth, $4.95 paper. Thirty film scholars discuss the various transformations involved in adapting literary works to the cinema. The essays examine the films in terms of cinematic specificity (*mise-en-scène,* narrative structure, visual metaphors, etc.) raising interesting perspectives on the problem of adaptation and questioning the conventional bases on which evaluative judgments are made (which is better—the novel or the film?) It also contains a useful guide to film adaptations of American novels (written before 1929) and rental sources. A great teaching aid for courses on literature and film. —SANDY FLITTERMAN

Penguin Film Review, 1946–1949. Introduction by Roger Manvell. London: Scolar Press; Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 81 Adams Drive. 2 vols., $45.00. This is a reprint of the entire run of the remarkable British journal that sprang up after World War II and spread a serious interest in cinema among

a new and avid readership. It drew upon film-makers, critics, novelists, historians—and its net was wide enough even to catch, on one occasion, Arletty. (Her father was a miner, she liked Beethoven, and she seems to have thought rather more of *Hôtel du Nord* than of *Children of Paradise.*) Libraries with film collections should have this set.

Peters, J.M. *Pictorial Communication.* Cape Town: David Philip, 1977. No price given. A brief outline of communication theory, based on Jakobson, Barthes, and others, translated from the Dutch.

Pickard, Roy. *The Oscar Movies From A-Z.* New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1978. $14.50 cloth. Five-line descriptions, partial credits.

Pinter, Harold. *A La Recherche du Temps Perdu: The Proust Screenplay.* New York: Grove Press, 1977. $2.95 paper.

Pratley, Gerald. *The Cinema of David Lean.* Cranbury, NJ: A. S. Barnes, 1974. $12.50. A film-by-film study.

———. *The Cinema of John Huston.* Cranbury, NJ: A. S. Barnes, 1977. $12.00. Almost the entirety of this book is an extended interview by Huston himself, surveying his entire career, film by film, telling stories about them all.

Rehrauer, George. *Cinema Booklist: Supplement Two.* Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1977. $15.00.

Reichert, Julia. *Doing It Yourself, A Handbook on Independent Film Distribution.* New York: The Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers, Inc. (99 Prince St., New York, NY 10012) 1977. No price given. Useful self-help information on distribution for independent video and film-makers.

Rovin, Jeff. *The Great Television Series.* Cranbury, NJ: A.S. Barnes, 1977. $15.00.

———. *Movie Special Effects.* Cranbury, NJ: A. S. Barnes, 1978. $17.50.

Rufsvold, Margaret I. *Guides to Educational Media, 4th Edition.* Chicago: American Library Association, 1977. $5.00 paper.

Sadoul, Georges. *Vie de Charlot: Charles Spencer Chaplin, ses films et son temps.* Paris: Lherminier, 1978. 69F. An elegantly produced new edition, with updated filmography and biographical summary, of Sadoul's engaging biocritical volume.

Sampson, Henry T. *Blacks in Black and White.* Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1977. $13.00.

Seidman, Steve. *The Film Career of Billy Wilder.* Boston: G.K. Hall, 1977. $15.00.

Souto, H. Mario Raimondo. *The Technique of the Motion Picture Camera* (3rd ed., revised and enlarged). New York: Hastings House, 1977. $22.50.

Spears, Jack. *The Civil War on the Screen and Other Essays.* Cranbury, NJ: A. S. Barnes, 1977. $17.50.

Speed, F. Maurice, ed. *Film Review 1977–78.* Levittown, NY: Transatlantic Arts, Inc., 1978. $12.50. An illustrated scrapbook on the year's releases, with a book review section by Ivan Butler.

Stedman, Raymond William. *The Serials: Suspense and Drama by Installment.* Second ed., rev. and enlarged. Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1978. $12.95.

Stewart, John. *Filmarama, Volume II: The Flaming Years, 1920–1929.* Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1977. $25.00.

Swann, Thomas Burnett. *The Heroine or the Horse: Leading Ladies in Republic's Films.* Cranbury, NJ: A. S. Barnes, 1978. $17.50.

Thomson, David. *America in the Dark: Hollywood and the Gift of Unreality.* New York: Morrow, 1977. $8.95. Miscellaneous ruminations by a British critic on the mysteries of American society and its movies.

Thorpe, Frances, ed. *International Index to Film Periodicals 1975: An Annotated Guide.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977. $30.00.

Tibbetts, John C., ed. *Introduction to the Photoplay: 1929—A Contemporary Account of the Transition to Sound in Film.* Shawnee-Mission, Kansas: The National Film Society, (7800 Conser Place, Shawnee-Mission, Kansas 66204), 1978. $19.95 A collection of lectures given by Academy members (film-makers, directors, critics, producers) and members of the academic community at USC in 1929 which provides a unique document of contemporary observations about the impact of sound on the film industry as well as a fascinating look at how this industry viewed itself and its cultural role. —SANDY FLITTERMAN

Trojan, Judith and Nadine Covert. *16mm Distribution Handbook.* New York: Educational Film Library Association (43 West 61 Street, 10023), 1977. $6.00. Information and advice from practitioners—the nitty-gritty of film-making, distributor deals, legal contracts, etc., etc. Every independent film-maker needs to know all this information before signing *any*thing!

Truitt, Evelyn Mack. *Who Was Who On Screen, 2nd Edition.* New York: Bowker, 1977. $29.95 cloth.

Tulloch, John, ed. *Conflict and Control in the Cinema: A Reader in Film and Society.* Melbourne, Australia: Macmillan, 1977. No price given. This top-heavy compilation (818 pages), which according to its editor

was "designed as an introduction to film and society" is too daunting, by virtue of its monstrous size, to be truly introductory; Tulloch, who admits that the scope of his collection of articles is "eclectic," simply has tried to cram too much material, too many variant approaches, between two covers, for *Conflict and Control* to do what he hopes it will do—to appeal to the "film buff" as well as "the specialist sociologist." He avoids chaos by using particular "critical perspectives" to cover particular types of film: "film as (mimetic) reflection of society" *à la* Kracauer is applied to the horror film, and the other headings are no less predictable—functionalism for the documentary, "interactionism" for Hollywood, structuralism (inevitably) for the Western. But neither the articles themselves (which do make the book worth dipping into), nor Tulloch's introductory essays to his six sections save *Conflict and Control* from being (in all senses of the word) too heavy. —PAUL THOMAS

Tuska, Jon, Vicki Piekarski, and David Wilson, eds. *Close-up: The Hollywood Director.* Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1978.

Van Wert, William F. *The Film Career of Alain Robbe-Grillet.* Boston: G. K. Hall, 1978. $18.00. Synopses and credits of the films, plus a bibliography very extensively annotated.

Vidal, Marion. *Les Contes Moraux d'Eric Rohmer.* Paris: Pierre Lherminier, 1977. 33F.

Wead, George and George Lellis. *The Film Career of Buster Keaton.* Boston: G.K. Hall, 1977. $15.00 cloth. A brief biographical essay, plus complete credits, synopses, and bibliography. Includes the shorts, which are not discussed in Daniel Moews's analytic study, *Keaton.*

Weinberg, Herman G. *The Lubitsch Touch: A Critical Study.* New York: Dover, 1977. $4.00. Revised and enlarged, with added photographs.

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———. *Tennessee Williams and Film.* New York: Ungar, 1977. $9.00 cloth. Thematic analyses of the plays and their adaptations.

Controversy and Correspondence

THE LAST OF THE SUTURE?

In response to the comments made by William Rothman and myself in *Film Quarterly* (Fall 1975 and Fall 1977 respectively), Stephen Heath has produced a new interpretation of the alleged significance of the "suture" in *Screen* (Winter 1977/1978), along with a translation of articles by Jean-Pierre Oudart that first introduced the term into film theorising. Up to this point, with the acquiescence of *Screen* and Stephen Heath, reference and discussion had centered on a presentation of the idea of the suture given by Daniel Dayan in *Film Quarterly* (Fall 1974), principally because anyone who glanced at Oudart's original articles in *Cahiers du Cinéma* a couple of years ago realized that what he was saying was both nebulous and confused, as non-readers of French can now see for themselves. (Stephen Heath himself describes Oudart's writings as having "a certain sliding of terms" and being "a wavering mesh of formulations.")

In his new presentation Heath extends the action of the concept into most aspects of cinema; into the effect of the edge of the film frame, the composition of the image, the duration of the shot, whether the people in the film look at the camera, all sorts of relations of sound and image, and also many (or all) of the ways that the audience might relate to the film itself. Since he does not specify these mechanisms, and only offers examples of a couple of them in one film, the sceptical might feel that a single concept is being used to do too much, that the "suture" is being invoked as an explanation for everything in the same way as "the will of God" was in low-grade mediaeval thinking. This impression is reinforced by Heath's presentation of Lacan's "demonstration" of the concept of the suture with an impressive-

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was "designed as an introduction to film and society" is too daunting, by virtue of its monstrous size, to be truly introductory; Tulloch, who admits that the scope of his collection of articles is "eclectic," simply has tried to cram too much material, too many variant approaches, between two covers, for *Conflict and Control* to do what he hopes it will do—to appeal to the "film buff" as well as "the specialist sociologist." He avoids chaos by using particular "critical perspectives" to cover particular types of film: "film as (mimetic) reflection of society" *à la* Kracauer is applied to the horror film, and the other headings are no less predictable—functionalism for the documentary, "interactionism" for Hollywood, structuralism (inevitably) for the Western. But neither the articles themselves (which do make the book worth dipping into), nor Tulloch's introductory essays to his six sections save *Conflict and Control* from being (in all senses of the word) too heavy. —PAUL THOMAS

Tuska, Jon, Vicki Piekarski, and David Wilson, eds. *Close-up: The Hollywood Director.* Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1978.

Van Wert, William F. *The Film Career of Alain Robbe-Grillet.* Boston: G. K. Hall, 1978. $18.00. Synopses and credits of the films, plus a bibliography very extensively annotated.

Vidal, Marion. *Les Contes Moraux d'Eric Rohmer.* Paris: Pierre Lherminier, 1977. 33F.

Wead, George and George Lellis. *The Film Career of Buster Keaton.* Boston: G.K. Hall, 1977. $15.00 cloth. A brief biographical essay, plus complete credits, synopses, and bibliography. Includes the shorts, which are not discussed in Daniel Moews's analytic study, *Keaton.*

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looking reference to symbolic logic. For here the innocent reader should be warned that Lacan manages to wrongly create three kinds of "or" out of the two kinds that can be distinguished both in modern logic and ordinary usage, these being the "exclusive or" corresponding to the Latin *aut,* and the "inclusive or" corresponding to the Latin *vel,* and worse than that, he refers to all his imaginary three "ors" as *vel.* The operation of what Lacan describes as the "alienating *vel*" seems to involve the use of the "exclusive or," i.e., *aut,* though here there is a further confusion of the union of two sets (their "logical sum") with the arithmetical sum of the elements constituting them. In fact what Lacan says is so wrong that his "demonstration" is no demonstration at all. Stephen Heath increases this confusion by substituting "exhaustive" for "exclusive" at a crucial point, so reversing Lacan's meaning.

Of course, it may be that Lacan's and Heath's total misunderstanding of the logic that is supposed to support the idea of the suture does not worry them, since their idea of the operations of the unconscious mind has now changed from the original claim that it was "structured like a language" to the idea that it is an "inconsistent multiplicity," and that its operations "go well beyond everything that the being who speaks is capable of stating." They may in fact be taking this as a liberation from rationality in what they write, for an "inconsistent multiplicity" can support any assertion or its opposite just as easily, and so no certain consequences can be deduced from it. It is difficult to see what the practical use of such a system might be.

—BARRY SALT

A REPLY FROM JOAN MELLEN

Far more disturbing than the shrill hysteria and unfounded generalizations of Sybil Thornton's review of my book, *The Waves At Genji's Door,* is that a long respected journal like *Film Quarterly* should have accepted so surly and unmeasured a personal attack. From its tone this review would clearly be better suited to a Birchite newspaper—or to the *Peking Review* in one of its tirades against the Gang of Four.

Most of the arguments offered by this review are so clearly ad hominem as to be far beyond the pale of rational discourse and that it should have found a place in the pages of one of the oldest film magazines is both appalling and surprising. It is with a heavy heart that I dispel some of the lies and innuendoes which permeate this diatribe. Twice Ms. Thornton refers falsely to the small number of Japanese films I have seen, something she could hardly know, and which, of course, is quite beyond the point of the discussions of the films which are given coverage in the book.

But pettiness is not the chief offense of this piece. Far worse are the grammatical errors which are so gross that they render the writing incoherent even as they camouflage the absence of any substantive, let alone intelligent, disagreement with my study of Japanese film and culture. "Mellen's determination to prove her points," writes Ms. Thornton, "leads her to extremes—including the reputation* of Tadao Sato, Japan's most prominent film critic-historian." We have long heard reports of the illiteracy of graduate students, but this example must surely stand as a paradigm. What, indeed, does Ms. Thornton wish to discuss regarding Mr. Sato's views, or his reputation?

Obviously your readers cannot possibly follow such writing, but more to the point must surely be how such atrocious writing, largely devoted to slander without verification, could have found its way into print in *Film Quarterly.*

The review is a compendium of just such a combination of illiteracy, hysterics and illogic. Ms. Thornton writes: "Mellen's polemic intentions lead her also to distort historical fact: she ignores the basic orientation of Chie Nakane's study, *Japanese Society*. . . ." Now whether or not I agree with the bias of Nakane's study is hardly a demonstration of distortion. The review persists in this pattern of falsification followed by unsubstantiated assertion.

There are frequent absurdities which surely must have made readers smile. I ignore, God help us, "Mizoguchi's tendencies to sadism." Another of my sins is a failure to offer a paean to the Japanese mother, a role so many young Japanese have challenged, exploring the diminution visited upon the women it thwarts. And beyond the unpleasant, authoritarian tone of this review it is riddled with errors of fact about Japanese film of which one example may suffice. The still from *Genroku Chushingura* is indeed, as *The Waves At Genji's Door* indicates, of an unmarried young woman and not Oishi's wife.

Finally I am accused of "undisguised contempt for Japanese women" because I sympathize with them in their plight, as if to explore the injustice visited upon any group lacking the advantages of power from American Indians to Japanese *burakumin* is to hate the victim. What remains astounding to me is that *Film Quarterly* has so deteriorated in its standards of writing, criticism and common decency as to print such rubbish.

*The editors inform me that this was a misprint for "repudiation." But we would still need to know why the words of Mr. Sato are too sacred to be subject to critical analysis, not to mention with which of his judgments Ms. Thornton is allying herself.

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